

THE SEMINAR OF  
**JACQUES LACAN**

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**BOOK II**

*By Jacques Lacan*

ECRITS: A SELECTION  
FEMININE SEXUALITY  
TELEVISION

THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN

BOOK I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954

BOOK II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the  
Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955

BOOK III: The Psychoses, 1955–1956

BOOK VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960

BOOK XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis

Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love  
and Knowledge, 1972–1973 (Encore)

THE SEMINAR OF  
**JACQUES LACAN**

Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller

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**BOOK II**

**The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the  
Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955**

TRANSLATED BY

Sylvana Tomaselli

WITH NOTES BY

John Forrester



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## TRANSLATORS' NOTE

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1. What follows is a complete translation of the seminar that Jacques Lacan gave in the course of a year's teaching within the training programme of the Société Française de Psychanalyse. The French text was prepared by Jacques-Alain Miller in consultation with Jacques Lacan, from the transcriptions of the seminar. Certain minor errors in the text have been corrected in the translation, and will be incorporated in later editions of the French text. All notes are supplied by John Forrester (who also compiled the index), in order to clarify questions of translation and supply limited bibliographical information.
2. We have aimed at an exact translation. This involves, however, finding appropriate colloquial English to correspond to a text which is both informal and complex – a rendition of Lacan's spoken French. The translation aims at being both informal and literary, corresponding as faithfully as possible with the original text.
3. As we needed to pay additional attention to the German background of many psychoanalytic concepts, in many passages the requirements of three languages had to be taken into account. There has been considerable debate in French analytic circles about the translation of Freud's works, in large part stimulated by these seminars of Lacan's, which, until the early 1960's, were advertised as 'Commentaries on the texts of Freud'. In recent years the admirable English edition of Freud prepared by James Strachey has also been the subject of discussion and criticism in the English-language world. Anticipating the decision of the next Freud translators, we have made one decision which follows the French translations of Freud at the expense of Strachey's: where '*investir, investi, investissement*' appears in the French text, corresponding to the German '*besetzen, besetzt, Besetzung*', we have translated this by 'invest, invested, investment', instead of 'cathect, cathected, cathexis'. We have also translated '*pulsion*', corresponding to '*Trieb*', by 'drive' and '*instinct*', corresponding to '*Instinkt*', by 'instinct'; this decision is hardly

controversial. Both of these decisions accord with Schneiderman's practice.<sup>1</sup> Other decisions are pointed out in the notes.

4. This Seminar, together with Seminar I, which is being published simultaneously, was worked on by both translators so as to produce uniformity in both terminology and style. We have paid considerable attention to the practices of previous translators of Lacan, in particular Anthony Wilden,<sup>2</sup> Alan Sheridan,<sup>3</sup> Stuart Schneiderman and Jacqueline Rose,<sup>4</sup> in the hope that some consistency in the English rendition of Lacan can be achieved. In attempting to follow our predecessors, we came to the conclusion that it was often more accurate to render one single French term by a variety of English terms. This was made all the more necessary in view of the fact that Lacan's 'technical' vocabulary was, throughout his life, always tentative and decidedly in flux. Nonetheless, the translations of the following terms have, or have acquired, such importance in discussion of Lacan's work that it may be useful to point them out, together with certain differences between our translation and that of other Lacan translators.

FRENCH TERM	PREVIOUS TRANSLATORS	THIS TRANSLATION
<i>parole</i>	Word (Wilden)	speech
<i>signification</i>	signification (Sheridan)	signification or significance
	meaning (Schneiderman)	
<i>sens</i>	sense (Schneiderman)	meaning
	meaning (Sheridan)	
<i>signifier</i>		to mean or to signify
<i>travail</i>		labour or work

5. In the original text, words in a language other than French were printed in italics. We have followed this practice, indicating in notes which words in the original appeared in English. An exception to this rule is made for the terms '*ego*' and '*moi*'. Both these terms are translated in this text by '*ego*'; when italicized, it is '*ego*' in the French; when it is in roman face, the original word is '*moi*'.

JOHN FORRESTER  
SYLVANA TOMASELLI  
Cambridge, June 1986

<sup>1</sup> In *Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980, pp. vii–viii.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Wilden, trans. and ed., *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, by J. Lacan, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: a Selection*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1977; Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, translated by Jacqueline Rose, London: Macmillan, 1982.

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The translators wish to acknowledge the enthusiasm shown by the Syndics of the University Press for the project of translating Lacan, and the friendly patience and understanding care with which the editors, Jonathan Sinclair-Wilson and Joanna Rainbow, assisted in the production of this volume. We are also grateful to Sebastian Gardner for his well-informed copy editing and to Jacques-Alain Miller for the meticulous attention to detail manifested in the substantial advice he has given.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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E Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris: Seuil, 1966. Where there are two numbers, separated by /, the first number refers to the page number in the French edition, the second to the page number in *Écrits; a Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan, London: Tavistock, 1977.

Sem Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, Paris: Seuil, 1973–, (25 volumes).

SE Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 volumes), edited by James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953–74.

GW Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* (18 volumes), London: The Hogarth Press, 1940–68.

Stud Freud, *Studienausgabe* (10 volumes with an unnumbered *Ergänzungsband*, abbreviated as *Erg*), Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1969–75.

Origins Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis. Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes 1887–1902*, ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, Ernst Kris, authorised translation by Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey, introduction by Ernst Kris, London: Imago, 1954.

Robert Paul Robert, *Dictionnaire Alphabétique & Analogique de la Langue Française*, Paris: S.N.L., 1977

The interventions of participants in the Seminar have on occasion been abbreviated by Jacques-Alain Miller; these omissions are indicated by dotted lines.

# INTRODUCTION

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# I

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## Psychology and metapsychology

TRUTH AND KNOWLEDGE

THE DENTIST'S COGITO

THE I IS NOT THE EGO. THE SUBJECT IS NOT THE INDIVIDUAL

THE CRISIS OF 1920

Hello, dear old friends, so here we are again.

Defining the nature of the ego will take us a long way. Well then, it is from this *long way off* that we will start in order to return back towards the centre – which will bring us back to the *long way*.

Our topic this year is *the Ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis*. But it isn't only within this theory and this technique that the ego has a meaning, and this is precisely what makes for the complexity of the problem.

The notion of the ego has been developed over the centuries as much by those commonly known as philosophers, with whom we are not afraid to rub shoulders here, as by the communal consciousness. In short, there is a certain pre-analytical notion of the ego – let us agree to call it thus, in order to give ourselves a sense of direction – which exerts an attraction on the radical innovation Freud's theory introduced with respect to this function.

We might well be surprised at such an attraction, indeed even subduction, or subversion, were it not for the fact that the Freudian notion of the ego is so upsetting as to warrant the expression *Copernican revolution*, the meaning of which we apprehended in the course of our meetings last year. These constitute the basis for those we will have this coming year.

The results we arrived at will be almost completely integrated into the new phase in which we now take up Freud's theory again, a theory which remains our guiding thread – do not forget that this is a seminar of texts.

### 1

The new perspectives opened up by Freud were destined to abolish the preceding ones. And yet, via innumerable detours, something happened to the usage of theoretical terms, and a notion of the ego has re-emerged, which is in no way that which the overall equilibrium of Freud's theory brings with it. On

the contrary, it tends towards the re-absorption, which is moreover openly admitted, of analytic knowledge within general psychology, which in this instance means pre-analytical psychology. And by the same token, for theory and practice are inseparable, the analytic relation, the direction of the practice, have been realigned. This is what the contemporary history of the technique of psychoanalysis shows us.

It remains very enigmatic. This wouldn't trouble us in the least if it were just a conflict between schools, between reactionaries and progressives, Ptolemaics and Copernicans. But it goes much further than that. What is at issue is the establishment of an efficacious, concrete complicity, between analysis, the liberating, demystifying treatment of a human relation, and the fundamental illusion of man's experience, or at least of modern man.

The man of today entertains a certain conception of himself, which lies half-way between naivety and sophistication. The belief he holds that he is constituted in this or that way partakes in a certain current of diffuse, culturally accepted notions. He may think that it is the result of a natural inclination, whereas in fact, in the present state of civilization, it comes to him from all sides. My thesis is that Freud's technique, at its origin, transcends this illusion which, in a quite concrete manner, has taken hold over the subjectivity of individuals. The question therefore is whether psychoanalysis will ever so gently allow itself to abandon what had opened up for a moment, or whether, on the contrary, it will again make manifest its cutting edge in such a way as to give it back its sharpness.

Hence the usefulness of referring to certain works of a certain style.

It makes no sense, to my mind, to cut up our remarks according to the different series in which they occur. Thus, what Alexandre Koyré introduced in his lecture yesterday evening concerning the function of the Platonic dialogue, starting specifically with the *Meno*, can, without any undue contrivance, be inserted into the framework of the teaching being developed here. The function of the Tuesday lectures, rightly called *extra-ordinary*, is indeed to enable each of you to crystallise the questioning left dangling at the outer edges of the domain we are investigating in this seminar.

Yesterday evening, I underlined, in the few comments I made, transforming *Meno's* equations, what one can call the function of truth in its nascent state. Indeed, the knowledge to which truth comes to be knotted must actually be endowed with its own inertia, which makes it lose something of the virtue which initiated its deposition as such, since it exhibits an obvious propensity to misrecognise its own meaning. Nowhere is this degradation more obvious than in psychoanalysis, and this fact, in and of itself, reveals the truly nodal point which psychoanalysis occupies within the limited advance of human subjectivity.

This singular ambiguity of knowledge and of truth can be seen at the origin – although one never really gets completely to the origin, let us take Plato as the origin, in the sense in which one speaks of the origin of coordinates. Yesterday evening we saw it revealed in the *Meno*, but we could just as easily have used *Protagoras* which wasn't mentioned.

Who is Socrates? He is the one who within human subjectivity inaugurates that style from which the notion of knowledge as tied to certain requirements of coherence has arisen, knowledge which is the prerequisite for any future progress of science as experimental – and we will have to define what the sort of autonomy which science has acquired within the experimental register signifies. Well then, at the very moment when Socrates inaugurates this new being-in-the-world which here I call subjectivity, he realises that science will not be able to transmit the means to achieve the most precious thing, the *aréte*, the excellence of the human being. Here already there is a decentring – it is by starting off with this virtue that a domain is opened up to knowledge, but this very virtue, with respect to its transmission, its tradition, its formation, remains outside of the domain. That is something which merits attention, rather than rushing off into believing that in the end everything will sort itself out, that it is only Socrates's irony, that sooner or later science will catch up with this through a retroactive action. Yet, up until now, nothing in the course of history has proved this to us.

What has happened since Socrates? A lot of things, and in particular, the concept of the ego has seen the light of day.

When something comes to light, something which we are forced to consider as new, when another structural order emerges, well then, it creates its own perspective within the past, and we say – *This can never not have been there, this has existed from the beginning*. Besides, isn't that a property which our own experience demonstrates?

Think about the origins of language. We imagine that there must have been a time when people on this earth began to speak. So we admit of an emergence. But from the moment that the specific structure of this emergence is grasped, we find it absolutely impossible to speculate on what preceded it other than by symbols which were always applicable. What appears to be new thus always seems to extend itself indefinitely into perpetuity, prior to itself. We cannot, through thought, abolish a new order. This applies to anything whatsoever, including the origin of the world.

Similarly, we can no longer do our thinking without this register of the ego which we have acquired over the course of history, even when we are concerned with traces of man's speculation about himself at times when this register was not pursued as such.

It seems to us then that Socrates and his interlocutors must have had an implicit notion of this central function, that the ego must have had for them a

function analogous to that which it occupies in our theoretical thinking, but also in the spontaneous apprehension we have of our thoughts, our tendencies, our desires, of what belongs to us and what does not, of what we admit to being expressions of our personality or what we reject as being parasitical on it. It is very difficult for us to imagine that the whole of this psychology isn't eternal.

Is this in fact the case? The question at least deserves to be raised.

To raise it leads us to examine more closely whether there isn't in fact a point when this notion of the ego can be grasped in its nascent state. We don't have to go very far, the evidence is still fresh. It doesn't go back much further than the period, still quite recent, in which so much progress in our lives took place, when we thought it funny to read in the *Protagoras* of someone arriving one morning at Socrates's – *Hallo! Come in, what is it? – Protagoras has arrived*. What amuses us, is that everything happens, just as Plato says it does, as if by chance, in complete darkness. This has never been noticed by anyone, because it can only interest those who, like us, for a mere seventy-five years, if that, are used to switching on the electric light.

Look at the literature. You say that that's the job of those who think, but those who don't think must always have had, more or less spontaneously, some notion of the ego. What makes you so sure? You, in any case, belong with those who think, or at least you are following on after people who have thought about it. So, let's try to open the question, rather than settling it so unthinkingly.

The type of people that we shall define, using a conventional notation, as *dentists* are very confident about the order of the universe because they think that Mr Descartes made manifest the laws and the procedures of limpid reason in the *Discourse on Method*. His *I think, therefore, I am*, so essential to the new subjectivity, is not as simple, however, as it would appear to these dentists, and some even think they detect in it a pure and simple sleight of hand. If it is in fact true that consciousness is transparent to itself, and grasps itself as such, it does seem that the *I* is not on that account transparent to it. It is not given to it as different from an object. The apprehension of an object by consciousness does not by the same token reveal to it its properties. The same is true for the *I*.

If this *I* is in fact presented to us as a kind of immediate given in the act of reflection by which consciousness grasps itself as transparent to itself, for all that, nothing indicates that the whole of this reality – and it is granting quite a bit already to say that we come to a judgement of existence<sup>1</sup> – would be exhausted by this.

The reflections of the philosophers have led us to a more and more purely formal notion of the ego, and, to be truthful, to a critique of this function. The development of thought turned away, at least temporarily, from the notion of

<sup>1</sup> See Freud, 'Negation' (1925h) GW XIV 11–15: Stud III 373–7; SE XIX 235–9.

the ego as a substance, as from a myth to be submitted to rigorous scientific scrutiny. Though embarked – whether or not legitimately is beside the point – on an attempt to consider it as a pure mirage, with Locke, with Kant, and even with the psychophysicists, who had only to follow their lead for different reasons, of course, and with other premises. They cast the greatest suspicion on the function of the ego, in as much as the latter more or less implicitly perpetuates the substantialism implicit in the religious conception of the soul, as a substance which at the very least is endowed with the properties of immortality.

Isn't it striking that, by an extraordinary conjuring trick of history – having abandoned for a moment the subversive element of Freud's contribution, which can be taken as a step forward within a certain tradition of the development of thought – we have returned to a state prior to this philosophical critique, which by any standard is not new?

We have used the term Copernican revolution to describe Freud's discovery. Not that what isn't Copernican is absolutely unambiguous. Men have not always believed that the Earth was a kind of infinite plate. They have also conceived of it as having limits, various shapes, sometimes that of a lady's hat. But nonetheless, they had the idea that there were things below, let us say at the centre, and that the rest of the world was built up on top of it. Well, if we do not know what a contemporary of Socrates might have thought of his ego, even so there must have been something at the centre, and there is no reason to believe Socrates ever doubted that. It was probably not made like the ego, which starts at a later date, which we can locate towards the middle of the sixteenth, beginning of the seventeenth centuries. But it was at the centre, at the base. In relation to this conception, the Freudian discovery has exactly the same implication of decentring as that brought about by the Copernican discovery. It is quite well expressed by Rimbaud's fleeting formula – poets, as is well known, don't know what they're saying, yet they still manage to say things before anyone else – *I is an other.*<sup>2</sup>

## 2

Don't let this impress you! Don't start spreading it around that *I is an other* – it won't impress anyone, believe me! And what is more, it doesn't mean anything. Because, to begin with, you have to know what an other means. The other – don't use this term as a mouthwash.

One of our colleagues, our ex-colleagues, who used to hobnob a bit with *Les Temps Modernes*, the journal of existentialism, as it's called, told us as if it were news that in order for someone to be analysed he had to be able to conceive of

<sup>2</sup> 'Je est un autre.'

the other as such. A real smart Alec, that one. We should have asked him – What do you mean by *the other*? – his fellow man, his neighbour, his ideal *I*, a washbowl? These are all others.

The unconscious completely eludes that circle of certainties by which man recognises himself as ego. There is something outside this field which has every right to speak as *I*, and which makes this right manifest by coming into the world speaking as an *I*. It is precisely what is most misconstrued by the domain of the ego which, in analysis, comes to be formulated as properly speaking being the *I*.

So this is the register within which what Freud has to teach us about the unconscious can take on its full importance and contours. The fact that he gave voice to this by calling it *the unconscious* leads him to real contradictions in *adjecto*, in speaking of unconscious thoughts – he says it himself, *sit venia verbo*,<sup>3</sup> and he constantly apologises for it. This is all terribly cumbersome, since, from the point of view of communication, at the time he started writing, he was forced to start off from the notion that what belongs to the order of the ego also belongs to that of consciousness. But that's not certain. If he says that, it is because of a specific stage in the development of philosophy which at that time assumed the equation *ego = consciousness*. But the more Freud's work progressed, the less easy he finds it to locate consciousness, and he has to admit that it is in the end unlocalisable. Everything is progressively more organised within a dialectic in which the *I* is distinct from the ego. In the end, Freud gives the game up for lost – there must be, he says, conditions beyond our grasp here. The future will tell us what these are. This year we will try to get a sense of how we can finally locate consciousness within the Freudian functionalisation.

With Freud, a new perspective suddenly appears, revolutionising the study of subjectivity and showing precisely that the subject cannot be confused with the individual. This distinction, which I first showed you on the subjective plane, can also be grasped – and, from the scientific point of view, this may be the most decisive step – on the objective plane.

If we consider from a behaviourist's perspective what is objectively to be found in the human animal, in the individual as an organism, we note a certain number of properties, of movements, manoeuvres and relations. From the organisation of such behaviour we infer the variable extent of the detours of which the individual is capable in order to attain those things which are assumed by definition to be his goals. That is how we get an idea of the nature of his relations with the external world, how one measures the degree of his intelligence, how one in effect fixes the level, the low-water mark, by which to measure the perfection, or *aréte*, of his species. Now what Freud's contribution was is the following – the manifestations of the subject in question can in no sense be localised on an axis, on which, the higher they would be, the more they

<sup>3</sup> (1918b) GW XII 116; Stud VIII 198; SE XVII 84.

would consistently be confused with the intelligence, the excellence, the perfection of the individual.

Freud tells us – intelligence has nothing to do with the subject, the subject is not on the same axis, it is ex-centric. The subject as such, functioning as subject, is something other than an organism which adapts itself. It is something else, and for those who are capable of understanding, its entire behaviour speaks of something other than the axis we can grasp when we consider it as a function of an individual, that is to say, with a specific number of interests conceived of in relation to the individual *aréte*.

We will confine ourselves to this topological metaphor for the moment – the subject is decentred in relation to the individual. That is what *I is an other* means.

In some ways, it can already be found on the periphery of the fundamental Cartesian intuition. If you take off your dentist's glasses in reading Descartes, you will become aware of certain puzzles he shows us, in particular that of a deceiving God. When one employs the notion of the ego, at the same time one cannot avoid the implication that there has been a misdeal somewhere along the line. The deceiving God is, in the end, the reintegration of what was rejected, *ectopia*.

About the same time, one of those frivolous minds who play at salon games – sometimes some very surprising things start there, minor entertainments sometimes do give rise to a new order of phenomena – a very odd fellow, who doesn't really fit our standard conception of the classical type, La Rochefoucauld to give him his name, all of a sudden took it upon himself to inform us of the peculiarity of something we hadn't thought long enough about, and which he calls *self-love*. It is rather surprising that this should have seemed so outrageous, for what in fact was he saying? He was emphasising that even those of our activities which seem to be most disinterested are motivated by the concern for glory – even passionate love or the most virtuous acts, however secret.

What exactly did he mean? Was he saying that we act with a view to our own pleasure? This is a very important question because everything in Freud will turn around it. If that was all that La Rochefoucauld had said, he would have only been repeating what had since time immemorial been taught in the schools – nothing is ever *since time immemorial*, but you can see the point of the *since time immemorial* on this occasion. Since Socrates, pleasure has been the search for one's good. Whatever we may think, we are pursuing our pleasure, seeking our good. The only question is whether a human animal of such a sort, considered behaviourally as we did just now, is intelligent enough to comprehend what is truly its good. If he understands wherein this good resides, he gains the pleasure which always results from it. Mr Bentham pushed this theory to its logical extreme.

But La Rochefoucauld makes us appreciate something else – that by engaging in so-called disinterested actions, we think we free ourselves from

the other as such. A real smart Alec, that one. We should have asked him – What do you mean by *the other*? – his fellow man, his neighbour, his ideal *I*, a washbowl? These are all others.

The unconscious completely eludes that circle of certainties by which man recognises himself as ego. There is something outside this field which has every right to speak as *I*, and which makes this right manifest by coming into the world speaking as an *I*. It is precisely what is most misconstrued by the domain of the ego which, in analysis, comes to be formulated as properly speaking being the *I*.

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Freud tells us – intelligence has nothing to do with the subject, the subject is not on the same axis, it is ex-centric. The subject as such, functioning as subject, is something other than an organism which adapts itself. It is something else, and for those who are capable of understanding, its entire behaviour speaks of something other than the axis we can grasp when we consider it as a function of an individual, that is to say, with a specific number of interests conceived of in relation to the individual *aréte*.

We will confine ourselves to this topological metaphor for the moment – the subject is decentred in relation to the individual. That is what *I is an other* means.

In some ways, it can already be found on the periphery of the fundamental Cartesian intuition. If you take off your dentist's glasses in reading Descartes, you will become aware of certain puzzles he shows us, in particular that of a deceiving God. When one employs the notion of the ego, at the same time one cannot avoid the implication that there has been a misdeal somewhere along the line. The deceiving God is, in the end, the reintegration of what was rejected, *ectopia*.

About the same time, one of those frivolous minds who play at salon games – sometimes some very surprising things start there, minor entertainments sometimes do give rise to a new order of phenomena – a very odd fellow, who doesn't really fit our standard conception of the classical type, La Rochefoucauld to give him his name, all of a sudden took it upon himself to inform us of the peculiarity of something we hadn't thought long enough about, and which he calls *self-love*. It is rather surprising that this should have seemed so outrageous, for what in fact was he saying? He was emphasising that even those of our activities which seem to be most disinterested are motivated by the concern for glory – even passionate love or the most virtuous acts, however secret.

What exactly did he mean? Was he saying that we act with a view to our own pleasure? This is a very important question because everything in Freud will turn around it. If that was all that La Rochefoucauld had said, he would have only been repeating what had since time immemorial been taught in the schools – nothing is ever *since time immemorial*, but you can see the point of the *since time immemorial* on this occasion. Since Socrates, pleasure has been the search for one's good. Whatever we may think, we are pursuing our pleasure, seeking our good. The only question is whether a human animal of such a sort, considered behaviourally as we did just now, is intelligent enough to comprehend what is truly its good. If he understands wherein this good resides, he gains the pleasure which always results from it. Mr Bentham pushed this theory to its logical extreme.

But La Rochefoucauld makes us appreciate something else – that by engaging in so-called disinterested actions, we think we free ourselves from

immediate pleasure, and are seeking a higher good, but we are mistaken. That is the novelty. This isn't a general theory claiming that egoism accounts for all human activities. That can already be found in Saint Thomas's physical theory of love – in love the subject is searching for his own good. Saint Thomas, who was only repeating what had been said for centuries, was in fact contradicted by a certain William of Saint-Amour, who observed that love had to be something other than the search for one's own good. In La Rochefoucauld, what is scandalous is not so much that for him self-love is the basis of all human behaviour, but rather that it is deceiving, inauthentic. There is a hedonism specific to the *ego*, and which is precisely what lures us, that is, which at one and the same time frustrates us of our immediate pleasure and of the satisfactions which we can draw from our superiority with respect to this pleasure. Here there's a division of planes, for the first time the introduction of an outline, which starts to open us up, through a certain diplopia, to what will seem like a real division of the plane.

This conception belongs to a tradition parallel to that of the philosophers, the moralist tradition. These are not people who specialise in ethics, but who introduce a so-called perspective of truth into the observation of moral conduct or mores. This tradition leads to Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, which remains entirely within this in some ways negative perspective, according to which human behaviour as such is deluded. It is into this hollow, into this bowl, that the Freudian truth comes to be poured. You are deluded, no doubt, but the truth lies elsewhere. And Freud tells us where it is.

What then erupts, with the crash of thunder, is the sexual instinct, the libido. But what is the sexual instinct? the libido? the primary process? You think you know – me too – but that doesn't mean we should be as certain about it as all that. You should take a closer look, and that is what we will try to do this year.

### 3

Where have we got to today? To a theoretical cacophony, to a conspicuous revolution in positions. And why? In the first place, because the metapsychological work of Freud after 1920 has been misread, interpreted in a crazy way by the first and second generations following Freud – those inept people.

Why did Freud think it necessary to introduce these new, so-called structural,<sup>4</sup> metapsychological notions, which we call the ego, the super-ego and the id? Because, in the experience of the aftermath of his discovery, a turning-point, a real crisis was reached. In short, this new *I*, with whom one was meant to enter into dialogue, after a while refused to answer.

This crisis is clearly expressed in the testimony of historical witnesses of the

<sup>4</sup> 'topique'. Usually referred to as 'structural' in English-language writings on Freud.

years between 1910 and 1920. In the course of the first analytical revelation, the subjects recovered more or less miraculously, and this is still apparent when we read Freud's cases with their interpretations which strike like lightning and their endless explanations. Well, it is a fact that it worked less and less well, that it ground to a halt in the course of time.

That is what prompted people to think that there is some reality in what I'm saying, that is, in the existence of subjectivity as such, and its modifications in the course of time, in accordance with a specific causality, a specific dialectic, which moves from subjectivity to subjectivity, and which perhaps escapes any kind of individual conditioning. Within the conventional units which we call subjectivities on account of individual particularities, what is happening? What is closing up? What is resisting?

Precisely in 1920, that is just after the change of direction which I have just mentioned – the crisis of analytic technique – Freud thought it necessary to introduce his new metapsychological notions. And if one reads what Freud wrote from 1920 on attentively, you realise that there is a direct link between this crisis in technique which had to be overcome, and the manufacture of these new notions. But for that you must read his writings – to read them in the right order is better still. The fact that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was written before *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, and before *The Ego and the Id*, should raise questions – no one has ever asked them.

What Freud introduced from 1920 on, are additional notions which were at that time necessary to maintain the principle of the decentring of the subject. But far from being understood as it should have been, there was a general rush, exactly like the kids getting out of school – *Ah! Our nice little ego is back again! It all makes sense now! We're now back on the well-beaten paths of general psychology.* How could one fail to come back to it with elation, when this general psychology is not only stuff from school or a mental commodity, but, what is more, is the psychology of everyman? There was satisfaction in being once againable to believe the ego to be central. And we see its latest manifestations in the amusing lucubrations which come to us at the moment from the other side of the pond.

Mr Hartmann, psychoanalysis's cherub, announces the great news to us, so that we can sleep soundly – the existence of the *autonomous ego*. This *ego* which, since the beginning of the Freudian discovery, has always been considered as in conflict, which, even when it was located as a function in relation to reality, never ceased to be thought of as something which, like reality, is conquered in a tragedy, is all of a sudden restored to us as a central given. To what inner necessity does the assertion that somewhere there must be an autonomous<sup>s</sup> *ego* answer?

This conviction extends beyond the individual naivety of the subject who

<sup>s</sup> English in the original.

believes in himself, who believes that he is himself – a common enough madness, which isn't complete madness, because it belongs to the order of beliefs. Obviously, we are all inclined to believe that we are ourselves. But we aren't so sure of it, take a closer look. In many very specific circumstances we doubt it, without for all that undergoing depersonalisation. It isn't therefore simply to this naive belief that they want us to return. It is properly speaking a sociological phenomenon, which concerns analysis as a technique, or if you prefer, as a ceremony, as a priesthood determined within a certain social context.

Why reintroduce the transcendent reality of the autonomous<sup>6</sup> *ego*? Looking at it closely, these autonomous<sup>6</sup> *egos* are more or less equal, according to the individuals. So we are back to an entification according to which not only individuals as such exist, but moreover some exist more than others. That is what contaminates, more or less implicitly, the so-called notions of the strong ego and the weak ego, which are just so many ways of ducking the issues raised as much by the understanding of the neuroses as by the handling of the technique.

We will consider all of this in its own due time and place.

So this year we will pursue the examination and criticism of the notion of the ego in Freud's theory, we will clarify its meaning in relation to Freud's discovery and to the technique of psychoanalysis, all through studying side by side some of its current uses, which are tied to a certain manner of conceiving the relation of one individual to another in analysis.

Freudian metapsychology does not begin in 1920. It is there from the very start – take a look at the collection on the beginnings of Freud's thought, the letters to Fliess, the metapsychological writings of that period – and is taken up again at the end of the *Traumdeutung*. It is sufficiently in evidence between 1910 and 1920 for you to have noticed it last year. In 1920, what may be called the last metapsychological period begins. For this period *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the primary text, the pivotal work. It is the most difficult. We won't resolve all of its puzzles right away. But that's how it happened – Freud first produced that, before elaborating his structural model [*topique*]. And if you put off dealing with it in order for you to get, or think you have got, to the bottom of the works of the following period, all you do is make the grossest of errors. That is how most analysts give up the challenge when it comes to the death instinct.

I would like some good soul, for instance Lefèvre-Pontalis, to give an initial reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

17 November 1954

<sup>6</sup> English in the original.

# II

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## Knowledge, truth, opinion

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ITS CONCEPTS

A TRUTH WHICH CANNOT BE GRASPED BY BOUNDED KNOWLEDGE

FORM AND SYMBOL

PERICLES, PSYCHOANALYST

THE YEAR'S PROGRAMME

Last time I gave a brief introduction to the problem into which I am expecting us to make some headway this year, that is, the ego in Freudian theory.

This notion cannot be identified with the ego of traditional classical theory, although it extends the latter – but given what it adds to it, within the Freudian perspective the ego takes on an entirely different functional value.

I gave you a sense that it is only rather recently that the ego has been theorised. Not only did the ego not mean in Socrates's time what it means today – open the books, you will see that the word is altogether absent – but actually – used here in the full sense of the word – the ego didn't have the same function.

A change in perspective has since upset the traditional notion of what could be the good, of, say, the individual, the subject, the soul, or of whatever else you want. The unitary notion of the good, as this perfection or *aréte*, which polarises and directs the fulfilment of the individual, was from a certain point on stamped with a hint of inauthenticity. I pointed out to you the real significance in this respect of La Rochefoucauld's thought. Open this small collection of maxims about nothing very much. Now, there's a peculiar society game, which affords us a kind of pulsation, or more exactly an instantaneous grasp of consciousness. It is a moment of reflection which has a truly active value, and is an ambiguous eye-opener – is it a concrete mirage of the relation of man with himself, or a simple coming to consciousness, the realisation, of something which had not been seen up until then?

The impact of psychoanalysis on this issue is that of a Copernican revolution. Every relation of man with himself changes perspective with the Freudian discovery, and this is what is involved in practice, such as we pursue it every day.

This is why, last Sunday, you heard me reject in the most categorical fashion the attempt at refusion of psychoanalysis with general psychology. The idea of a unilinear, pre-established individual development, made up of stages each

appearing in their turn, according to a determined typicity,<sup>1</sup> is purely and simply the giving up, the conjuring away, the camouflage, the negation, properly speaking, even the repression of the essential contribution of analysis.

We have heard this bid for syncretism from the mouth of the only advocate of this tendency who knows how to deliver a coherent discourse. You could see what this coherent discourse led him to uphold – *Analytical concepts have no value whatever, they don't correspond to reality*. But this reality, how are we to grasp it, if we don't designate it by means of our vocabulary? And if, in continuing to do so, we believe that this vocabulary is only a signal of things which would be beyond, that it is reducible to little labels, designations floating in the unnamed of everyday analytic experience? If that were the case, it would simply mean that another has to be invented, that is, practice something other than psychoanalysis. If psychoanalysis isn't the concepts through which it is formulated and transmitted, it isn't psychoanalysis, it is something else, but if that's the case, then that should be made clear from the start.

However – and therein lies the sleight of hand – these same concepts continue to be used, of course, otherwise the experience would completely disintegrate – and I don't mean that this doesn't happen, in actual fact, to some people who let themselves go to the point of reducing psychoanalysis to general psychology. But psychoanalytical concepts quite simply do exist, and it is because of them that psychoanalysis endures. The others use them, they cannot but make use of them, but in a way which is neither integrated, nor articulated, nor capable of making itself understood, nor of being transmitted, nor even of being defended. And that's why as soon as they enter into dialogue with others as happened last Sunday, that is, with psychiatrists, they slip their vocabulary back into their pockets, saying that that isn't what's so important in the analytical experience but rather what is is the interchange of forces, that is, what you can't poke your nose into.

The character of Meno did not afford a pointless preamble to our cycle of work this year. Its value is exemplary – at least for those who are here and try to understand. For them, there will be no share in the confusion which, from what I've been told, reigns in some minds, in accordance with which Meno would be the analysand, the unhappy analysand whom we ridiculed the other evening. No, Meno isn't the analysand, he's the analyst – the bulk of analysts.

I wouldn't want to leave hanging whatever may have been left unfinished in our meeting with Alexandre Koyré. I know it was our first meeting, and that it is always hard to knit something into a dialogue. It really is an art, a maieutics. Some of those who might have had something to contribute to it weren't able to do so, except off-stage. We can't pretend to exhaust the question of the Platonic dialogue in one evening. The important thing is that it is still with us, alive and open.

<sup>1</sup> *Typicité*.

Nevertheless, it would be unfortunate if what Octave Mannoni said to me after the lecture weren't put into circulation within our community. Does he still remember what occurred to him after my own intervention on the function of *orthè doxa*? For there is, in truth, a puzzle in this *orthè doxa*.

## 1

O. MANNONI: *What struck me about the drift of M. Koyré's lecture is firstly an almost spontaneous tendency to assimilate directly the Platonic dialogue and the Socratic maieutics to analysis. I would like to challenge this all too easy assimilation by drawing attention to the fact that for Plato, there is a forgotten truth, and maieutics consists in bringing it to light, in such a way that the dialogue is a mixture of truth and error, and dialectic a kind of sieve for truth. In analysis, it isn't the same kind of truth, it is a historical truth, whereas the first kind appears, from one point of view, as a truth of natural science. It is rather surprising that the unconscious is sometimes called the forgotten language, as Eric Fromm does, and at other times the basic language, as Senatspräsident Schreber does, that is to say, sometimes wisdom and sometimes madness. So that what comes back to light in the analytical maieutics is the truth in error and the error in truth. That is completely different from what happens in a Platonic perspective. I also think that M. Koyré pulls *orthè doxa* onto the side of what primitives call the customs which people live by. Consequently, it can in fact happen that someone – Meno, and especially Anytos – who is attached to customs which people live by feels himself threatened in the face of epistemological investigation. It may be that here there is a conflict which reappears in analysis, when someone who is confident, who trusts in what he is doing, worries about what might happen if one put him on the spot.*

It is true that there has been, and not only on the part of M. Koyré, a somewhat abusive inclination to compare the handling of the dialogue with Meno to the analytic experience.

Now, as far as truth is concerned, do take note what the aim of the *Meno* is. The *Meno* shows how one gets truth from the mouth of the slave, that is to say, from anyone, and that any and everybody is in possession of the eternal forms. If present experience presupposes reminiscence, and if reminiscence is what ensues from the experience of previous lives, then it must be the case that these experiences have also been had with the help of a reminiscence. There's no reason why this recurrence should come to an end, which shows us that it is indeed a matter of a relation to the eternal forms. It is their awakening in the subject which explains the passage from ignorance to knowledge. In other words, one can't know anything, if only because one already knows it. But this isn't, properly speaking, the aim of the *Meno*.

The aim and paradox of the *Meno* is to show us that the *epistêmê*, knowledge bounded by a formal coherence, does not cover the whole of the field of human

experience, and in particular there is no *epistêmê* of what brings about perfection, the *arêté* of this experience.

I should say now that we will have to ask ourselves what these relations are in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

What is highlighted in this dialogue, is not simply that Meno doesn't know what he is saying, it is rather that he doesn't know what he is saying regarding virtue. Why? – because he was a bad pupil of the Sophists – he doesn't understand what the Sophists have to teach him, which isn't a doctrine which explains everything, but the use of discourse, which is really quite different. You can see how bad a pupil he is when he says – *If Gorgias were here, he would explain all this to us. You would be knocked over by what Gorgias said.* The system is always in the other.

What Socrates highlights is precisely the following, that there is no *epistêmê* of virtue, and more precisely of what is the essential virtue – for us no less than for the Ancients – political virtue, by which citizens are bound into one body. Excellent, pre-eminent, practitioners, who are not demagogues, Themistocles, Pericles, act at that highest level of action, political government, by reason of an orthodoxy, which isn't defined for us in any other way than the following, that there is here a truth which cannot be grasped by a bounded knowledge.

*Orthodoxia* has been translated as a *true opinion*, and this is indeed the meaning.

If the constitution of an *epistêmê*, within the vast uproar, the hubbub, the confusion, of sophistry, is Socrates's role, it remains to be understood what he expects from it. Because Socrates doesn't believe that it is everything.

There would still be a lot to say about Socrates's points of reference. Socrates always includes a reference to techniques in his dialectics, not that he makes techniques the models for everything, because he knows very well that there are differences between those of the pilot, the shipbuilder, the physician, and the higher technique of those who govern the state. And in the *Meno*, he shows us again exactly where the breach is.

M. HYPPOLITE: *You're somewhat avoiding Mannoni's question.*

I'm not avoiding it. I have been skirting around it for a long time. But do you agree with what I've been saying?

M. HYPPOLITE: *I'm waiting for what's to come, in order to decide. I think Mannoni just now made clear the fundamental difference between the Platonic dialogue and that of analysis.*

I take that for granted, and it is completely irrelevant.

M. HYPPOLITE: *I think one can avoid the radical aspect of this difference. And I was wondering if that was what you were trying to get at. I was waiting for what comes next.*

You'll see.

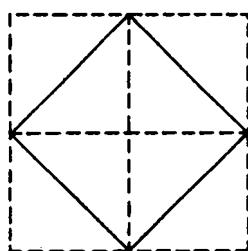
It isn't easy to wrap things up. That's because our *epistêmê* has made so much progress that it is evidently constituted completely differently from Socrates's. Nevertheless, it would be wrong not to realise that, even based on the model of experimental science, the modern *epistêmê*, as in Socrates's time, consists essentially in a certain coherence of discourse. It is simply a matter of knowing what this coherence means, what kind of bond it involves. It is to this word 'relation' that we will address a great many of the questions which we will be raising here starting off with what I will try to teach you about the ego.

I'll make another comment, before I lay my cards on the table. In wanting to give Meno an example of the way in which the discourse of science is constituted, in showing him that he doesn't need to know that much, that there is no need to believe that he'll find it in the discourse of the Sophists, Socrates says: *Take this human life, this one here, the slave, and you will see that he knows everything. All that is needed is to awaken it.* Now read again with some care the manner in which he makes the slave discover the truth in question, that is – how to double the surface of the square, after having realised that a certain number of surface units corresponds to one of its sides, units which are proportional to this side.

Well, the slave may be in possession of all the sciences in the book, as accumulated in his previous life, it won't change the fact that he will start by making a mistake. He goes astray by quite properly employing what we use as a starting-point in the standard intelligence test – he employs the relation of equivalence  $A/B = C/D$ , the means intelligence most consistently employs. This procedure leads him mathematically to the erroneous belief that in doubling the side one will double the surface.

With the figure drawn in the sand Socrates shows him that this could not be the case.

The slave sees clearly that the surface constructed by doubling the side of 2 is twice what one wanted to obtain – 16 instead of 8. But it doesn't help him in resolving the problem, and it is Socrates who shows him that by removing the four corners of the large square, one reduces it by exactly half, that is by 8, and that in this way the inside square is 8, and constitutes the required solution.



Don't you see there is a fault-line between the intuitive element and the symbolic element? One reaches the solution using our idea of numbers, that 8 is half of 16. What one obtains isn't 8 square-units. At the centre we have 4 surface units, and one irrational element,  $\sqrt{2}$ , which isn't given by intuition. Here, then, there is a shift from the plane of the intuitive bond to a plane of symbolic bond.

This demonstration, which is an example of the shift from the imaginary to the symbolic, is quite evidently accomplished by the master. It is Socrates who effects the realisation that 8 is half of 16. The slave, with all his reminiscence and his intelligent intuition, sees the right form, so to speak, from the moment it is pointed out to him. But here we put our finger on the cleavage between the imaginary, or intuitive, plane – where reminiscence does indeed operate, that is to say the type, the eternal form, what can also be called *a priori* intuitions – and the symbolic function which isn't at all homogeneous with it, and whose introduction into reality constitutes a forcing.

I will ask M. Riguet, who is a mathematician, if I am saying things which seem to him to be controversial?

M. RIGUET: *I agree.*

I do feel better for having a mathematician agree with me.

You see then that the function here shown to be generic to the bonds which Socrates incorporates into the *épistémè*, fundamentally brings into question the value of the symbolic invention, the emergence of speech. There is a moment in the history of geometry when  $\sqrt{2}$  appears. Up until then, they just hovered close to it. Retrospectively, one can say that the Egyptian and Indian geometers caught a glimpse of it, that they found a way of dealing with it. Similarly, Socrates, who right there on the sand, pulls a neat trick, and finds an equivalent for it. But the autonomy of  $\sqrt{2}$  is not at all brought out in the dialogue. When it appears, it generates a great many things, a complete mathematical transformation, in which the slave no longer has any role to play.

M. HYPPOLITE: *You argue then that in Plato any invention once made turns out to generate its own past, turns out to be an eternal discovery. Actually, we are perverted by Christianity, which makes us locate a given eternal truth as antecedent. Whereas Platonism, following to a great extent the movement which we might call historicity, shows us that the invention of the symbol, once invented, turns out to be an external past. The notion of eternal truth has perhaps not the meaning that the Middle Ages gave it, and upon which Mannoni's interpretation is clearly based. That is why I am saying that there could exist a paradoxical bond between the Platonic dialogue and analysis, and that that was what you were looking for in the relation between symbolism and truth.*

That's still not quite right. I in fact believe that there are two sorts of relations to time. From the moment that a part of the symbolic world comes into

existence it does indeed create its own past. But not in the same way as the form at the intuitive level. It is precisely in the confusion of the two planes that the error lies, the error of believing that what science constitutes by the intervention of the symbolic function has always been there, that it is given.

This error exists in all knowledge, in as much as it is only a crystallisation of the symbolic activity, and once constituted, it forgets it. In all knowledge once constituted there is a dimension of error, which is the forgetting of the creative function of truth in its nascent form. That it is forgotten in the experimental domain is just about understandable, since it is bound up with purely operant<sup>2</sup> activities – operational<sup>2</sup> as we say, I don't quite know why, when the word 'operant' says it just as well. But we analysts, we can't forget it, we who work in the dimension of this truth in its nascent state.

What we discover in analysis pertains to the level of *orthè doxa*. Everything which takes effect in the field of analytic action precedes the constitution of knowledge, which doesn't change the fact that in operating in this field we have constituted a knowledge, and one which has even proved itself to be exceptionally efficacious, as is quite natural, since any science arises from a use of language which precedes its own constitution, and that it is through this use of language that the analytic action develops.

This is also why the more we know, the greater the risks. All you are taught in a more or less pre-digested form in the so-called institutes of psychoanalysis – sadistic, anal stages etc. – all this is of course very useful, especially for people who aren't analysts. It would be stupid for a psychoanalyst systematically to neglect them, but he must be aware of the fact that that isn't the dimension in which he operates. He must fashion himself, come to be at ease in a domain other than the one where what in his experience is slowly constituted out of knowledge is deposited, laid down.

O. MANNONI: *I entirely agree.*

Except I think I am explaining to you what you put to us earlier as being an enigma. You said that on both sides there was truth and falsehood, falsehood and truth. They had, for you, a strictly symmetrical and inverse distribution.

O. MANNONI: *I didn't put it forward as an enigma. What seemed enigmatic to me is that the opinion of the general public is all too eager to tag psychoanalysis on to Platonism.*

There are two sorts of public, the one here, which at least has a chance of finding out what's what, and the other, which drops in from all kinds of places, to sniff out a little of what's happening, which thinks this is funny, a subject for passing comments on, for dinner-table conversation, and which understandably gets a bit lost. If they want to find out which way is up, all they need to do is

<sup>2</sup> The French terms are 'opérantes' and 'opérationnelles'.

to be a bit more assiduous. We can't discourage curiosity enough – these aren't lectures for the fashion-conscious. If they come in order to believe that we are going to turn psychoanalysis into the extension of the Platonic dialogue, they are wrong. They should get better informed.

Founding speech, which envelops the subject, is everything that has constituted him, his parents, his neighbours, the whole structure of the community, and not only constituted him as symbol, but constituted him in his being. The laws of nomenclature are what determine – at least up to a point – and channel the alliances from within which human beings copulate with one another and end up by creating, not only other symbols, but also real beings, who, coming into the world, right away have that little tag which is their name, the essential symbol for what will be their lot. Thus the *orthè doxa* which Socrates leaves behind him, but in which he feels completely enveloped – since after all that's also where he starts out from, since he is in the process of constituting this *orthè doxa* which he leaves behind – we ourselves place it, once again, at the centre. That's what analysis is.

In the end, for Socrates, though not necessarily for Plato, if Themistocles and Pericles were great men, it was because they were good psychoanalysts.

In their own register, they discovered what true opinion means. They are at the heart of this historical reality in which a dialogue is taken up, when no truth of any kind can be located in it in the form of a generalisable knowledge which is always true. To give the reply that one has to in response to an event in so far as it is significant, in so far as it is a function of a symbolic exchange between human beings – it could be the order given to the fleet to leave Piraeus – is to give the right interpretation. And to give the right interpretation at the right moment, that's to be a good analyst.

I don't mean to say that the statesman is a psychoanalyst. It is precisely Plato who, with the *Statesman*, begins to construct a science of politics, and God knows where it has led us since. But for Socrates, the good statesman is a psychoanalyst. That's my reply to Mannoni.

O. MANNONI: *I don't quite agree. There is another side of the alternative which seems to me to be more Socratic. Pericles and Themistocles were good statesmen for another reason, they had orthè doxa, they were what today we call gentlemen.<sup>3</sup> They were so well integrated into their social milieu, they had so few problems, so little need of science, that it is almost the reverse.*

That is what I'm in the middle of telling you, my dear fellow. It wasn't because they were born psychoanalysts, without having been psychoanalysed, that they weren't good psychoanalysts.

It is obvious that at that time, it was only the masters who made history, and

<sup>3</sup> English in the original.

that the slave who Socrates wanted to put through his paces has nothing to say. It will still take him some time to be Spartacus. For the moment he is nothing. It is precisely because only gentlemen<sup>4</sup> have something to say in this story that they find the right words. And even a chap like Socrates will be turned out<sup>4</sup> because he stepped a little too far out of line from the society of gentlemen.<sup>4</sup> By dint of *epistêmê*, he misses out on *orthè doxa*, and they will make him pay dearly for it, in a stupid way. But it is also that, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty has remarked, Socrates did show some good will – he might well have almost had them on. Maybe he wasn't altogether there at the time? He probably had his own reasons for staging another kind of demonstration. After all, it wasn't that ineffective. It did have a symbolic meaning.

## 2

There is a bit of time left. Have you anything to tell us today, Pontalis?

I think it is always best to begin to tackle questions at their most difficult point – then, you only have to work your way down. That's why I wanted us to begin with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Of course, I didn't want Pontalis to be burdened with the task of giving us straight off an exhaustive analysis, because we will only understand this text after having been through everything Freud says concerning the ego, from one end to the other of his work.

I want to remind you that this year you must all read the following texts from cover to cover and with the greatest care.

Firstly, *Aus den Anfängen der Psychoanalyse*, which includes the letters to Fließ and the *Entwurf*, which is a preliminary, already self-contained, psychological theory. The great discovery of the period after the war was that of these youthful papers of Freud's. Read this *Project* for a so-called psychological theory, which is already a metapsychology with a theory of the *ego*. You'll also find it in English under the title *The Origins of Psycho-analysis*.

Secondly, the *Traumdeutung*, especially the chapter entitled 'The psychology of the dream-processes'. In the German edition or failing that in the English one.

Thirdly, the texts concerning what is considered to be Freud's second metapsychology, grouped together in the French translation under the title of *Essais de Psychanalyse*. It contains *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* and the *The Ego and the Id*, which are the three articles fundamental to the comprehension of the *ego*.

Fourthly, there are other things you can read, such as the articles 'Neurosis and psychosis', 'The loss of reality in neurosis and psychosis', 'Analysis terminable and interminable'.

Fifthly, you must be acquainted with Freud's last work, this incomplete essay

<sup>4</sup> English in the original.

called in German *Abriss der Psychoanalyse*, which provides some signposts as to the way in which Freud superimposed on the first topographical account he had given of the psyche – unconscious, preconscious, conscious – the new topography of the ego, the super-ego and the id. It is only in the *Abriss* that you will find any hints on this point.

With the above, which ranges from Freud's first to his last work, you have the element in which we will try to conduct the analysis of Freudian theory.

O. MANNONI: – *May I draw our attention to the last article in the Collected Papers, 'Splitting of the ego'?*<sup>5</sup>

That is precisely where all the confusions began.

Pontalis, you have ten minutes to tell us the questions which the initial reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has inspired in you.

M. LEFÈVRE-PONTALIS: *I will briefly remind you what the title means. You will recall that Beyond the Pleasure Principle is an essay in which Freud discovers that the pre-eminence which he had first accorded to the pleasure principle, tied to the principle of constancy, according to which the organism must be able to reduce tension to a constant level, he discovered then that this principle is not exclusive, contrary to what he had first asserted. It is as if he were somehow pushed by a certain number of facts to go beyond what he had first asserted. But he is in some difficulty in this text which I didn't know until now.*

*First of all there are the dreams of those with traumatic neuroses, that is, the strange fact that in the traumatic neuroses there always is a rerun of the dream of the traumatic situation. So that the idea of the dream as a hallucinatory fulfilment of desire collapses.*

*Next, the games endlessly repeated by children. There's the famous example of the eighteen-month-old child left by his mother, and who each time throws an object away and retrieves it again – a process of continual disappearance, and reappearance. The child tries to take on an active role in this situation.*

*Most important is what happens in the transference situation, when the analyst dreams the same dreams over and over again, always the same ones. And in a general way, he is led to repeat instead of simply remembering. It is as if resistance didn't only arise, as Freud first believed, solely from the repressed, but uniquely from the ego. And he finds his initial conception of the transference modified. The latter isn't simply defined as the product of a disposition for transference, but as a compulsion to repeat.*

*In short, these facts lead Freud to objectify, and to move on to assert that there is something other than the pleasure principle, that there is an irresistible tendency<sup>6</sup> to repeat, which would transcend the pleasure principle and the reality principle, which, although opposed in a way to the pleasure principle, would complete it, at the heart of*

<sup>5</sup> English in the original.

<sup>6</sup> The French term is 'tendance'; 'compulsion' translates 'compulsion'.

*the principle of constancy. It is as if, alongside the repetition of needs, there was a need for repetition, of which Freud is aware long before he actually introduces it.*

*At this point it is out of the question to follow Freud in the biological project which he seeks to offer as infrastructure. I would simply like to raise some questions concerning what we have covered up until now.*

*Something which struck me – since I am meant to play the part of the innocent – is that the tendency to repeat seems defined in a contradictory fashion.*

*It seems defined by its goal, and its goal, to take the example of the child's game, seems to be to master what threatens a given equilibrium, to assume an active role, to triumph over unresolved conflicts. At this point, the tendency to repeat seems to be the generator of tension, the purveyor<sup>7</sup> of progress, whereas the instinct, in the sense in which Freud uses it, is on the contrary only a principle of stagnation. The key idea is that the tendency to repeat modifies the pre-established harmony between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, that it leads to broader and broader integrations, that it is therefore the purveyor of human progress. The title of the article is then justified. The compulsion to repeat would be beyond the pleasure principle, since it would constitute the condition for a kind of human progress, instead of being, like the pleasure principle, a relation of security.*

*If we adopt the other point of view, if we cease to define the tendency to repeat by its goal, and define it by its mechanism, it appears as pure automatism, as regression. To illustrate this aspect, Freud uses many examples drawn from biology. The tension aspect is illustrated by the facts of human progress, while the regression aspect is illustrated by the phenomenon of alimentary hygiene.*

*That is the construction which I thought I discerned between the tendency to repeat, purveyor of progress, and the tendency to repeat, mechanism. One mustn't give up trying to describe this repetition in biological terms, and understand it in purely human terms. Man is led into mastering it by his death, his stagnation, his inertia, which he can always fall back into.*

*Second question. This inertia could be intimated by the ego, which Freud defines very explicitly as the nucleus of resistances in the transference. It is one step in the evolution of his doctrine – the ego in analysis, that is in a situation which challenges the precarious equilibrium, the constancy, the ego introduces security, stagnation, pleasure. In such a way that the function of the relation of which we spoke a moment ago will not define every subject. The ego, whose main task is to transform everything into secondary energy, into bound energy, won't define every subject, hence the appearance of the tendency to repeat.*

*The question of the nature of the ego could be bound to the function of narcissism. There again, I have found some contradictions in Freud, who sometimes seems to identify it with the self-preserved instinct, and sometimes speaks of it as a sort of quest for death.*

*That is more or less what I wanted to say.*

<sup>7</sup> 'le facteur'.

*Did it seem to be sufficiently intelligible, in its brevity?*

As brief as it may have been, I think that the way in which Pontalis has raised the problem is remarkable, because he really points to the heart of the ambiguities with which we will have to deal, at least in the first stages, in our attempt to understand the Freudian theory of the ego.

You spoke of the pleasure principle as being equivalent to the tendency to adaptation. You do realise that this is precisely what you subsequently put into question. There is a profound difference between the pleasure principle and something else which differentiates itself off from it, like these two English terms which can render the word '*besoin*' – need<sup>8</sup> and drive.<sup>8</sup>

You have put the question aptly by saying that a certain way of talking about it implies the idea of progress. But perhaps you haven't sufficiently insisted on the fact that the notion of the tendency to repeat as drive<sup>8</sup> is very explicitly opposed to the idea that there is anything at all in life which has a tendency towards progress, contrary to the perspective of conventional optimism, of evolutionism, which leaves the problematic of adaptation – and I would even go so far as to say that of reality – completely open.

You were right to underline the difference between the biological register and the human register. But this can only be of interest if one realises that the question of this text emerges from the confusion between these two registers. No other text so profoundly questions the very meaning of life. It leads to a confusion, I would almost say a radical confusion, of the human dialectic with something which is in nature. There is here a term that you did not mention, and which is, however, absolutely essential, that of the *death instinct*.

You very rightly showed that this isn't simply Freudian metaphysics. The question of the ego is entirely implicated here. You have only sketched it out – otherwise you would have accomplished what I am going to help you to do this year.

Next time I will take up the question of the ego and of the pleasure principle, that is to say, I will take up at one and the same time what figures at the end of Pontalis's question and what he encountered at the beginning.

24 November 1954

<sup>8</sup> English in the original.

# BEYOND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE, REPETITION

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# III

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## The symbolic universe

DIALOGUES CONCERNING LÉVI-STRAUSS  
LIFE AND THE MACHINE  
GOD, NATURE AND THE SYMBOL  
THE NATURAL IMAGINARY  
FREUDIAN DUALISM

Yesterday evening's meeting marked a definite step forward in comparison with the first session, since we maintained the dialogue better and for longer.<sup>1</sup>

I have some evidence as to the comings and goings which this elicits in each person's subjectivity – *Will I make an intervention? – Won't I make an intervention? – I didn't make an intervention – etc.*

Surely you must have realised, if only by the way I conduct them, that these sessions are not analogous to so-called scientific meetings. It is in this sense that I ask you to take careful note of the following, that in these open sessions, you aren't by any means on display, despite the fact that we have outside guests, sympathisers and others. You mustn't try to say elegant things, aimed at putting you in the limelight and increasing the esteem in which you are already held. You are here to be receptive to things you haven't as yet seen, and which are in principle unexpected. So, why not make the most of this opportunity by raising questions at the deepest level you can, even if that comes out in a way which is a bit hesitant, vague, even baroque.

In other words, the only criticism I have to make of you, if I may, is that you all want to appear too clever. Everybody knows you are. So why do you want to appear as such? And, in any case, what is so important, either about being or appearing to be so?

That said, those who weren't able to vent their spleen, or the opposite, yesterday, are asked to do so now, since the whole point of those meetings is what comes out of them.

### 1

Already Anzieu is volunteering. I would be grateful if he says what he has to say.

<sup>1</sup> On 30 November 1954, Claude Lévi-Strauss gave a lecture to the Société Française de Psychanalyse, entitled 'Kinship versus the family'.

Anzieu's question is not reproduced here.

Durandin seemed to say that the violence of the prohibition of incest was something measurable, being translated into clearcut social acts. That isn't true. In order to discover the Oedipus complex, it was first necessary to examine neurotics, so as then to move to a much wider circle of individuals. That is why I said that the Oedipus complex, with the intensity of fantasy that we have discovered it to possess, the importance and the presence that it has on the imaginary level for the subject we are dealing with, must be conceived of as a recent, terminal and not original, phenomenon, in comparison with what Lévi-Strauss is telling us about.

But how can you attach such importance, my dear Anzieu, to the fact that Lévi-Strauss includes words like *compensation* in his vocabulary, when speaking, for example, of Tibetan or Nepalese tribes in which little girls are killed, which has as its consequence that there are more men than women? The term *compensation* in this case has only a statistical value, without any relation to the analytic term.

We are obliged to concede to Lévi-Strauss that numerical elements have a role in the constitution of a collectivity. M. de Buffon made some very apt remarks on this subject. What is troublesome is that when it comes to the monkey ladder, as you put your feet on one rung, you forget the steps below – or you let them rot. In consequence one always has only a strictly limited field to which the whole of the conception applies. But it would be wrong not to take in Buffon's extremely apt remarks on the role played by statistical elements in a group, in a society.

There's a lot in these remarks, since they deprive all kinds of pseudo-finalist questions of their relevance. There are questions which one doesn't need to ask oneself, because they are dispelled all by themselves as a consequence of the spatial distribution of numbers. Those sorts of problems still exist, and are studied at those demographical levels to which Lévi-Strauss made a vague reference.

Buffon asked himself why bees make such pretty hexagons.<sup>2</sup> He noticed that no other polyhedron fills a surface in so practical and pretty a manner. It is a kind of pressure on the occupation of space which requires that they be hexagons, and one doesn't have to create sophisticated problems of the type – do bees know geometry?

You can see the meaning which the word *compensation* might have in that case – if there are less women, there will necessarily be more men.

But your mistake goes even deeper when you speak of finality, when you believe that Lévi-Strauss confers a soul on the society when he speaks of the traffic from one family to another. There would be a lot to say about the usage

<sup>2</sup> Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*, Paris, 1753, IV 99.

even of the term finality, of its relations with causality, and intellectual rigour requires one to accord it some attention, if only to note that finality is always implied, in a variously embryonic form, in every causal notion – except when one expressly opposes causal thought to the finalist conception. For causal thought, finality doesn't exist, but the fact that one must emphasize that is sufficient proof that the notion is difficult to deal with.

What is original in Lévi-Strauss's notion of the elementary structure?

Throughout he emphasizes the fact that nothing is understood about the facts now collected for some considerable time concerning kinship and the family, if one tries to deduce them from any natural or naturalising dynamic. Incest as such doesn't elicit any natural feeling of horror. I don't say that we can base our work on this fact, all I'm saying is that this is what Lévi-Strauss says. There is no biological reason, and in particular no genetic one, to account for exogamy, and he demonstrates that with an extremely precise discussion of the scientific data. In a society – and we can imagine societies other than human societies – the permanent and constant practice of endogamy would not only not have any disadvantages, but would after a certain time have the result of eliminating the alleged hereditary defects. There is no possible means, starting from the natural plane, of deducing the formation of this elementary structure called the preferential order.

And what does he base this on? On the fact that, in the human order, we are dealing with the complete emergence of a new function, encompassing the whole order in its entirety. The symbolic function is not new as a function, it has its beginnings elsewhere than in the human order, but they are only beginnings. The human order is characterised by the fact that the symbolic function intervenes at every moment and at every stage of its existence.

In other words, the whole thing holds together. In order to conceive what happens in the domain proper to the human order, we must start with the idea that this order constitutes a totality. In the symbolic order the totality is called a universe. The symbolic order from the first takes on its universal character.

It isn't constituted bit by bit. As soon as the symbol arrives, there is a universe of symbols. The question one might ask – how many symbols, numerically, does it take to constitute the symbolic universe – remains open. But however small the number of symbols which you might conceive of as constituting the emergence of the symbolic function as such in human life, they imply the totality of everything which is human. Everything is ordered in accordance with the symbols which have emerged, in accordance with the symbols once they have appeared.

Everything which is human has to be ordained within a universe constituted by the symbolic function. It's not for nothing that Lévi-Strauss calls his structures *elementary* – he doesn't say *primitive*. *Elementary* is the opposite of *complex*. And, oddly enough, he hasn't written *The Complex Structures of Kinship*

yet. We are the representers of complex structures, and they are characterised by being much more amorphous.

DR BARGUES: *Lévi-Strauss has spoken of complex structures.*

Of course. He alludes to them, he indicates the points of insertion, but he hasn't discussed them.

In elementary structures, the rules of alliance are part of an extraordinarily rich, luxuriant network of preferences and prohibitions, of indications, of commands, of facilitations, and cover a much larger field than the complex forms. The closer we get, not to the origin, but to the element, the more the structuration, the amplitude, the intricacy of the specifically symbolic structure of nomenclature imposes itself. The nomenclature of kinship and alliance is more comprehensive in the elementary forms than in the so-called complex forms, that is to say those forms elaborated in cultural cycles of far greater extension.

This is one of Lévi-Strauss's fundamental points, one which shows the fertility of his thinking in this book. On this basis, we can formulate the hypothesis that this symbolic order, since it always presents itself as a whole, as forming a universe all by itself – and even constituting the universe as such, as distinct from the world – must also be structured as a whole, that is to say, it forms a dialectic structure which holds together, which is complete.

Some systems of kinship are more viable than others. Some lead to impasses which are properly speaking arithmetical and which presuppose that from time to time crises occur within the society, bringing with them ruptures and new beginnings.

On the basis of these arithmetical studies – understanding arithmetical not only as the manipulation of collections of objects, but also as including the significance of these combinatory operations, which exceeds any sort of given which might be deduced experimentally from the living relation of the subject to the world – Lévi-Strauss demonstrates that there is a correct classification of what the elementary structures of kinship make available to us. This presupposes that the symbolic agencies function in the society from the start, from the moment it takes on a human appearance. But this is nothing more nor less than what is presupposed by the unconscious such as we discover and manipulate it in analysis.

This is exactly where there was some uncertainty yesterday evening in Lévi-Strauss's answer to my question. For, in truth, in a manoeuvre often found in people who produce new ideas, a kind of hesitation to sustain all of their sharp edge, he almost returns back to the psychological level. The question which I put to him in no way implied a collective unconscious, as he called it. What solution could seriously be expected from the word 'collective' in this instance, when the collective and the individual are strictly the same thing? No, it isn't a

matter of positing a communal soul somewhere, in which all these calculations would take place, it isn't a question of any psychological entification, it is a question of the symbolic function. The symbolic function has absolutely nothing to do with a para-animal formation, a totality which would make of the whole of humanity a kind of large animal – for in the end, that's what the collective unconscious is.

If the symbolic function functions, we are inside it. And I would even say – we are so far into it that we can't get out of it. A large part of the problems which confront us when we try to scientificate, that is to say to bring order to a certain number of phenomena, first in line being those of life, in the end it is always the paths of the symbolic function which lead us, much more than any sort of direct apprehension.

Thus, when it comes down to it, we always try to explain the living organism in terms of mechanism. The first question which we analysts must answer, and which can perhaps help us get away from the controversy which exists between vitalism and mechanism, is the following – why are we led to think of life in terms of mechanism? In what way actually are we, as men, parents of the machine?

**M. HYPPOLITE:** *In so far as we are mathematicians, in so far as we have a passion for mathematics.*

That's right. The philosophical criticisms made of strictly mechanistic research assume the machine to be deprived of freedom. It would be very easy to prove to you that the machine is much freer than the animal. The animal is a jammed machine. It's a machine with certain parameters that are no longer capable of variation. And why? Because the external environment determines the animal, and turns it into a fixed type. It is in as much as, compared to the animal, we are machines, that is to say something decomposed, that we possess greater freedom, in the sense in which freedom means the multiplicity of possible choices. This is a way of looking at it which is never highlighted.

**M. HYPPOLITE:** *Hasn't the word machine fundamentally and sociologically changed its meaning, from its origins up to cybernetics?*

I agree with you. I am in the process, for the first time, of trying to inculcate in my listeners the idea that the machine is not what a vain people think it is. The meaning of the machine is in the process of complete transformation, for us all, whether or not you have opened a book on cybernetics. You're behind the times, it's always like that.

People in the eighteenth century, the ones who introduced the idea of mechanism – an idea which it is in good taste to pour scorn on today, a notion of small machines quite removed from life, a superseded notion, so you believe – people like La Mettrie, whom I can't encourage you enough to read, those

people who lived that, who wrote *L'Homme-Machine*, you can't imagine the extent to which they were still all caught up in the categories of an earlier age, which truly dominated their thinking. One must read the thirty-five volumes of the *Encyclopédie des Arts et des Techniques* from end to end, which sets the tone for the period, to become aware of the extent to which scholastic notions dominated what they were trying, not without an effort, to introduce. These attempts at reduction based on the machine, at the functionalisation of the phenomena which occur on the human level, were very far ahead of the complications which held good in their mental functioning when they took up any common or garden theme.

Look up the word *amour*, the word *amour-propre* in the *Encyclopédie* – you'll see how far removed their human feelings were from what they were trying to construct in the way of knowledge of man.

It is only much later, in our thinking or that of our fathers, that mechanism took on its full, purified, naked meaning, a meaning exclusive of all other interpretative systems. That is an observation which allows us to grasp what it means to be a precursor. What it isn't, which would be completely impossible, is the anticipation of the categories which emerge later and which haven't yet been created – human beings are always immersed in the same cultural network as their contemporaries, and the ideas they have can only be theirs as well. Being a precursor means seeing what it is one's contemporaries are constituting in the way of ideas, of consciousness, of action, of techniques, of political forms, seeing them as they will be seen a century later. Yes, that can happen.

There is a mutation taking place in the function of the machine, which is leaving all those who are still bent on criticising the old mechanism miles behind. To be a little ahead means realising that this has as its consequences the complete reversal of all the classical objections raised to the use of purely mechanistic categories. I think I'll have the opportunity to demonstrate this to you this year.

## 2

Has anyone still got a question to ask?

O. MANNONI: *What interested me was the manner in which Lévi-Strauss addressed the problem of nature and culture. He said that for some time now, the opposition between nature and culture has no longer been visible. The work that was being done continued to look for nature somewhere on the side of affectivity, of impulsions, of the natural foundation of being. Now, what brought Lévi-Strauss to set himself the question of nature and culture was that it seemed to him that a certain form of incest, for instance, was both universal and contingent. And this type of*

*contradiction brought him to a kind of conventionalism which has baffled a good number of listeners. I made the following observation – it is troubling to find this problem of the contingent and the universal elsewhere than in the institutional world. Right-handedness is a universal form, and yet it is contingent – we could be left-handed. And no one has ever been able to prove that it was social or biological. There is something profoundly obscure for us here, which is of the same kind as that in Lévi-Strauss. To go further, and show that the obscurity is really very serious, one can note that in molluscs of the helical variety, which are clearly not institutional, there is also a universal coiling round which is contingent, since they could be coiled the other way, and some individuals in fact are coiled the other way. It seems therefore that the question raised by Lévi-Strauss is much larger than the classical opposition of the natural and the institutional. It isn't surprising, therefore, if he also tries to feel which is his natural and which his institutional side, as every one did yesterday. That seems extremely important to me – we are confronted by something which dissolves both the old idea of nature and that of the institution.*

M. HYPPOLITE: *That would be a universal contingency.*

O. MANNONI: *I don't know.*

I think you are bringing in things which perhaps were not implied by the notion of contingency that Lévi-Strauss invoked. I think that for him contingency was opposed to the idea of the necessary – in fact, he said as much. The question he posed, which we might well in the end think naive, concerns the distinction between the universal and the necessary. Which also ends up raising the question of what we could call the necessity of mathematics. It is quite clear that it warrants a special definition, and that is why I talked just now about the universe. With respect to the introduction of the symbolic system, I think that the answer to the question raised by Lévi-Strauss yesterday, is that the Oedipus complex is both universal and contingent, because it is uniquely and purely symbolic.

M. HYPPOLITE: *I don't think so.*

The contingency now suggested by Mannoni belongs to a completely different order. The value of the distinction between nature and culture which Lévi-Strauss introduces in his *Elementary Structures of Kinship* is that it allows us to distinguish the universal from the generic. There's absolutely no need for the symbolic universal to be spread over the entire surface of the world for it to be universal. Besides, as far as I know, there's nothing which entails the world unity of human beings. There's nothing which is concretely realised as universal. And yet, as soon as any symbolic system is formed, straightforwardly it is, *de jure*, a universal as such. The fact that men have, with some exceptions, two arms, two legs and a pair of eyes – which in any case they have in common with

animals – the fact that they are, as someone once put it, featherless bipeds, plucked chickens, all of that is generic, categorically not universal.<sup>3</sup> You bring in your helix coiled one way or the other. The question you are asking pertains to the natural type.

O. MANNONI: *That is what I am putting into question. Up until now, men have opposed to nature a pseudo-nature, the human institutions – one encounters the family in the same way one encounters the oak or the birch. And then they decided that these pseudo-natures were a result of human liberty or of the contingent choices of man. And in consequence they were led to attach the greatest importance to a new category, culture, opposed to nature. Studying these questions, Lévi-Strauss ends up no longer knowing which is nature, which is culture, precisely because one encounters problems of choosing, not only in the universe of nomenclatures, but in the universe of forms. From the symbolism of the nomenclature to the symbolism of the whole form, nature speaks. It speaks by coiling to the right or to the left, by being right- or left-handed. It is her own way of making contingent choices such as families or arabesques. At this point, it is true, I find myself at a watershed and I no longer know which way to go. I wanted to share my difficulty. I don't have a solution, just a difficulty.*

M. HYPPOLITE: *It seems to me that earlier on you quite rightly opposed the universal to the generic, by saying that universality was tied to symbolism itself, to the modality of the symbolic universe created by man. But then it is a pure form. Your term universality at bottom means that a human universe necessarily affects the form of universality, it attracts a totality which is universalised.*

That is the function of the symbol.

M. HYPPOLITE: *Does that answer the question? It only shows us the formal character which a human universe acquires.*

There are two senses of the word *formal*. When one speaks of mathematical formalisation, we are dealing with a set of conventions from which you can generate a whole series of consequences, of theorems which follow on from one another, and establish certain structural relations, a law, in the strict sense of law, within a set. In the gestaltist sense of the word, in contrast, form, the *good form*,<sup>4</sup> is a totality, but it is actualised and isolated.

M. HYPPOLITE: *Is this second sense yours, or the first?*

Unquestionably the first.

M. HYPPOLITE: *Nonetheless, you did speak of totality, so this symbolic universe is purely conventional. It affects the form in that sense in which one speaks of universal*

<sup>3</sup> See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* II 5, 92a 1–5.

<sup>4</sup> The corresponding German term within Gestalt psychology is usually rendered into English as 'good shape'. Occasionally in this Seminar, this is the translation given, but more often '*la bonne forme*' is translated as 'good form'.

*form, without, for all that, it being generic or even general. I wonder if you aren't giving a formal solution to the problem raised by Mannoni.*

Mannoni's question has two sides.

First there is the problem he raises, which is stated in the form *signature rerum* – do things themselves possess, naturally, a specifically asymmetrical character? There is something real, a given. This given is structured in a specific manner. In particular natural asymmetries exist. Within the present line of development of our understanding, are we going to get to the bottom of their mysterious meaning? One whole human tradition, known as the philosophy of nature, busied itself with this kind of reading. We know what that yields. It never gets very far. It leads to completely ineffable things, which moreover soon peter out – except if one wants to carry on regardless, ending up with what is commonly called a delirium. This is certainly not the case with Mannoni, whose mind is too sharp, too dialectical, not to raise such a question save in the form of a problem.

The second thing is knowing if this wasn't the point Lévi-Strauss was getting at when he told us yesterday evening that, after all, he found himself, at the edge of nature, prey to vertigo, asking himself whether the roots of the symbolic tree weren't to be rediscovered in her. Private conversations I've had with Lévi-Strauss allow me to enlighten you on this point.

Lévi-Strauss is in the midst of backtracking as regards the very sharp bipartition which he makes between nature and symbol, whose creative value he nonetheless well appreciates, because it is a method which allows him to distinguish between registers, and by the same token between orders of facts. He wavers, for a reason which may seem surprising to you, but which he has made quite explicit – he is afraid that the autonomy of the symbolic register will give rise to a masked transcendentalism once again, for which, as regards his affinities, his personal sensibility, he feels only fear and aversion. In other words, he is afraid that after we have shown God out of one door, we will bring him back in by the other. He doesn't want the symbol, even in the extraordinarily purified form in which he offers us it, to be only a re-appearance, under a mask, of God.

That is what lies at the base of the wavering which he showed signs of when he put into question the methodical separation of the symbolic from the natural plane.

**M. HYPPOLITE:** *It isn't any the less true that to call on the symbolic universe does not even resolve the question of the choices man has made.*

Certainly not.

**M. HYPPOLITE:** *There is no doubt that what we used to call institutions, implying a certain number of contingent choices, enter into the symbolic universe. But, having said this, it doesn't give us the explanation for these choices.*

It isn't a question of explanation.

M. HYPPOLITE: *But we are nonetheless confronted with a problem.*

It is precisely the problem of origins.

M. HYPPOLITE: *I don't deny that the mark of a systematic universality has been imprinted by the symbolic relation. But this guise itself requires explanation and leads us to the problem which Mannoni raised. I would like to address a criticism to you. How does the use of the word symbolic help us? What does it give us? That's the question. I don't doubt that it is useful. In what way does it contribute? And what does it contribute?*

I use it to give an account of the analytic experience. You were able to see that last year, when I showed you that it is impossible to bring the diverse aspects of the transference together correctly, if one doesn't start with a definition of speech, of the creative function, of full speech. In the analytic experience, we encounter it under different aspects—psychological, personal, interpersonal—it occurs in an imperfect, refracted, diversified way. Without a radical stand on the function of speech, transference is purely and simply inconceivable. Inconceivable in the true sense of the word—there is no concept of transference, nothing but a multiplicity of facts tied together by a vague and inconsistent bond.

### 3

Next time I will introduce the question of the ego in the following form: *Relations between the function of the ego and the pleasure principle.*

I think I can show that in order to gain an idea of the function which Freud designates by the word 'ego', as indeed to read the whole of the Freudian metapsychology, it is necessary to use this distinction of planes and relations expressed in the terms, the symbolic, the imaginary and the real.

What's the point? The point is to retain the meaning of a particularly pure symbolic experience, that of analysis. I will give you an example of it, by giving you a foretaste of what I will tell you regarding the ego.

In its most essential aspect, the ego is an imaginary function. That is a discovery yielded by experience, and not a category which I might almost qualify as *a priori*, like that of the symbolic. On account of this point, I would almost say on account of this point alone, we find in human experience a door opened out on to an element of typicality. Of course, to us this element appears on the surface of nature, but in a form which is always misleading. That is what I wanted to insist on when I spoke of the failure of the various philosophies of nature. It is also very misleading with respect to the imaginary function of the ego. But this is a deception to which we are committed up to the hilt. In as much

as we are the ego, not only do we experience it, but it is just as much a guide to our experience as the different registers that have been called guides in life, that is, sensations.

The fundamental, central structure of our experience really belongs to the imaginary order. And we can even grasp the extent to which this function is already different in man from what it is in nature as a whole.

We rediscover the imaginary function in nature in a thousand different forms – all the Gestaltist captations linked up to the parade, so essential to sustaining sexual attraction within the species.

Now, in man the function of the ego possesses distinct characteristics. That's the great discovery of analysis – at the level of the generic relation, bound up with the life of the species, man already functions differently. In man, there's already a crack, a profound perturbation of the regulation of life. That's the importance of the notion introduced by Freud of the death instinct. Not that the death instinct is such an enlightening notion in itself. What has to be comprehended is that he was forced to introduce it so as to remind us of a salient fact of his experience, just when it was beginning to get lost.

As I observed a little while ago, when an apperception of the structure is ahead of its time, there is always a moment of weakness when one is inclined to abandon it.

That is what happened in the circle around Freud when the meaning of the discovery of the unconscious was pushed into the background. They reverted to a confused, unitary, naturalistic conception of man, of the ego, and by the same token of the instincts. It was precisely in order to regain the sense of his experience that Freud wrote *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. I will show you what necessity led him to write those last paragraphs, of whose fate at the hands of the majority of the analytic community you are well aware. It is said they are incomprehensible. And even when one does show willingness to follow Freud, mouthing the *death instinct*, one doesn't understand it any more than the Dominicans, so prettily riddled by Pascal in *Les Provinciales*, had a clue about sufficient grace. I ask all of you to read this extraordinary text of Freud's, unbelievably ambiguous, almost confused, to read it several times, otherwise you won't understand the literal critique I am going to make of it.

The final paragraphs have quite literally remained a closed book, refusing to speak. As yet they have never been elucidated. They can only be understood if one understands what Freud's experience amounted to. He wanted to save some kind of dualism at all costs, just when this dualism was crumbling in his hands, and when the ego, the libido, etc., all of that was tending to produce a kind of vast whole, returning us to a philosophy of nature.

This dualism is none other than what I am getting at when I emphasize the autonomy of the symbolic. Freud never formulated that. To get you to

understand it, a critique and exegesis of his text will be necessary. I can't now take for granted precisely what has to be proven this year. But I believe that I can show you that the category of symbolic action is well-founded.

M. HYPPOLITE: *I wasn't denying that. The symbolic function is for you, if I understand it correctly, a transcendental function, in the sense that, quite simultaneously, we can neither remain in it, nor can we get out of it. What purpose does it serve? We cannot do without it, and yet we cannot inhabit it either.*

Of course. It is presence in absence and absence in presence.

M. HYPPOLITE: *I wanted to understand what there was to be understood.*

If you want to stick by what you are giving me now, on the phenomenological plane, I have no objection. Only I believe it is insufficient.

M. HYPPOLITE: *Doubtless. I believe so too.*

And, to be candid, being purely phenomenological doesn't get us very far.

M. HYPPOLITE: *I agree.*

That can only obscure the path we have to follow, by setting in advance the tone which it will retain from then on. Does the use I make of the symbolic register just lead one into locating your transcendence somewhere, a transcendence which, after all, surely must exist? Is that what it is about? I don't think so. The allusions I have made to a completely different use of the notion of machine might well indicate that.

M. HYPPOLITE: *My questions were only questions. I was asking you what enabled you to avoid answering Mannion's question by saying that there was nothing to reply to, or at least that one would get side-tracked in answering it.*

I said that I don't think that that is the meaning one has in mind in saying that Claude Lévi-Strauss is going back to nature.

M. HYPPOLITE: . . . *refuses to go back to her.*

I also said that we have, of course, to take the formal side of nature into account, in the sense in which I qualified it as possessing pseudo-significant symmetry, because that is what man embraces in order to produce his fundamental symbols. The important thing is what gives the forms of nature symbolic value and function, what makes them function in relation to one another. It is man who introduces the notion of asymmetry. Asymmetry in nature is neither symmetrical, nor asymmetrical – it is what it is.

Next time I wanted to tell you about the following – *the Ego as function and as symbol.* That is where the ambiguity is played out. The ego, the imaginary function, intervenes in psychic life only as symbol. One makes use of the ego in

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the same way as the Bororo does the parrot. The Bororo says *I am a parrot*, we say *I am me* [*moi*]. None of that has the slightest importance. The important thing is the function it has.

O. MANNONI: *After Lévi-Strauss one has the impression that we can no longer use the notions of culture and nature. He destroys them. The same is true for the ideal of adaptation we talk about all the time. Being adapted simply means being alive.*

There's something to that. It pertains to the same order as what I was implying just now by saying that at a given point in time Freud wanted to defend some sort of dualism at all costs. As a result of the rapid evolution of the theory and technique of analysis, Freud found himself faced with a drop in tension analogous to that which you discern in the mind of Lévi-Strauss. But, in his case, it may not be his last word.

1 December 1954

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# IV

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## A materialist definition of the phenomenon of consciousness

EXPERIENCE AND DESTINY

'THE CORE OF OUR BEING'

THE EGO IS AN OBJECT

FASCINATION, RIVALRY, RECOGNITION

Indem er alles schaft, was schaftet der Höchste? – Sich.  
Was schaft er aber vor er alles schaftet? – Mich.

We are going to encounter this distich of Daniel von Chepko's again later on, if I manage to take you where I want to today.

The laws governing this kind of teaching in themselves contain a reflection of its meaning. Here I do not pretend to anything more than to get you to read Freud's works. I do not pretend to replace that, if you won't commit yourselves to it. You must realise that the form which I try to give here to the Freudian teaching will only take on its meaning and its full importance for you if you refer to the texts, so as to bring the insights I give you to bear on the difficulties you'll find in them.

Indeed, these texts are sometimes difficult, borrowing from a problematic weave of questions which manifests itself in contradictions. These contradictions are organised contradictions, but for all that they remain contradictions, and not just antinomies. Sometimes Freud, by following his own path, ends up with positions which seem contradictory even to him, and he reconsiders some of them – which, for all that, doesn't mean that he didn't think them justified at the time. In short, this movement of Freud's thought, which never reached journey's end, which was never cast into a definitive, dogmatic form, is what you must learn to comprehend for yourselves. It is to ease this comprehension that I try here to impart to you what I have myself gained from my reading of Freud's works, informed by an experience which, at least in principle, was directed in accordance with them. I say *at least in principle*, since here I continually put into question whether that thought has always been clearly understood, or even rigorously kept to in the development of analytic technique.

I am teaching you that Freud discovered in man the substance and the axis of a subjectivity surpassing the individual organisation considered as the sum of individual experiences, and even considered as the line of individual development. I am giving you a possible definition of subjectivity, by formulating it as an organised system of symbols, aiming to cover the whole of

an experience, to animate it, to give it its meaning. And what are we trying to realise here, if not a subjectivity? The directions indicated, the doors opened for you here into our experience and our practice are intended to inspire you to extend them into concrete action.

## 1

In this teaching, as in an analysis, we have to deal with resistances.

The resistances always have their seat in the ego, so analysis teaches us. What corresponds to the ego, is what I sometimes call the sum of the prejudices which any knowledge comprises and which each of us has as individual baggage. It is something which includes what we know or think we know – for knowing is always in some way believing one knows.

On account of that fact, when you are shown a new perspective, in a manner which is decentred in relation to your experience, there's always a shift, whereby you try to recover your balance, the habitual centre of your point of view – a sign of what I am explaining to you, which is called resistance. What you should do, on the contrary, is open your minds to the notions being generated by another domain of experience, and turn it to your own profit.

Let us take an example. Claude Lévi-Strauss the other day opened up for us a perspective which implies the radical relativisation of familial reality, which should provide us with the occasion for revising what can for us be too fascinating, too absorbing, the reality which we have to deal with everyday. So, how did one of our longstanding companions choose to express himself on the subject? After all, he said, rather than worry ourselves about the conventionalism of the familial system, let us remind ourselves that in the family, there are not just the parents, there are also children. From the point of view of the child, the reality of the family is restored. What we analysts have to deal with, is the relation of the child to the parents. That is what stops us from getting lost in this extremely disorienting relativism.

To restore the family in this manner to the concrete reality of the child's experience certainly has far-reaching implications: locating the centre of the analytic experience in the fact that each individual is a child. But this intervention itself testified to this intellectual tendency to centre our analytic experience on individual, psychological experience.

What one shouldn't do, and I will illustrate this using what we encountered, no later than on the morrow, in the so-called supervision group.

A subject did in fact dream of a child, of a babe in arms in its primitive state of impotence, lying on its back, like a little up-turned turtle, flapping its four limbs about. He dreamt of this child, an isolated image. Straight off, for specific reasons, I felt obliged to say to the person who was reporting this dream to me – *This child is the subject, there is no doubt about it.*

Another dream was brought to me, confirming this imagery as representing

the subject. The dreamer himself is swimming in a sea which has very special characteristics – let us say, going straight to the associations, the imaginary and verbal context, that it is so constituted as to be at the same time the analyst's couch, the cushions in the analyst's car and, of course, the mother. On this sea are written numbers which clearly refer to the birth date and the age of the subject.

What is the backdrop to this dream? The subject is extremely preoccupied with a child who is about to be born, for whom he feels responsible, and for whom he fantasises, it seems, an imaginary paternity. This crucial situation appears in such an ambiguous way that it cannot but occur to one to think that the subject must have deep motives for fantasising this, for reality does not cast light on the matter. In fact, in a kind of sub-delirious anxiety regarding his responsibilities as the progenitor, the subject reproduces a question which is essential to him, that is – is he himself a legitimate child, yes or no?

It is only because, to some degree or other, the analyst has already put to him – *This story is really about you* – that the subject comes up with this dream. And what underlies the dream is – *Aren't I, after all, your child, you the analyst?*

You can see that what this throws into relief isn't, as is usually believed, the concrete, affective dependency of the child in relation to supposedly more or less parental adults. If the subject asks himself the question what kind of child he is, it isn't in terms of being more or less dependent, but as having been recognised or not, having or not having the right to bear his name as the child of so-and-so. It is in as much as the relations in which he is caught up are themselves brought to the level of symbolism, that the subject questions himself about himself. For him, when it occurs it is as a problem of the second degree, on the plane of the symbolic assumption of his destiny, in the register of his auto-biography.

I wouldn't say that, in the analytic dialogue, everything always takes place at this level, but what you must get straight is that this is the essentially analytic level. A great many children fantasise about having another family, about being the children of people other than those who take care of them. I would say that it is a typical, normal phase in the development of the child, bringing all kinds of offspring into the world, and which cannot be neglected even outside the analytic experience.

So then – and this is what I've been leading up to – what is the analysis of resistances?

It doesn't mean, as one tends, if not to formulate it – and it is formulated, I could give you lots of examples – then at least to practice it, it doesn't mean intervening with the subject so that he becomes aware of the manner in which his attachments, his prejudices, the equilibrium of his ego, prevent him from seeing. It doesn't mean persuading him, which leads pretty quickly to suggestion. It doesn't mean reinforcing, as they say, the ego of the subject, or to make an ally of its healthy part. It doesn't mean convincing. What it means is, at every instant of the analytic relation, knowing at what level the answer

should be pitched. Sometimes this answer may have to be pitched at the level of the ego. But that has nothing to do with the case I'm considering. The subject's question in no way refers to what might ensue from weaning, abandonment, vital lack of love or affection, or whatever, it concerns his history in as much as he fails to recognise [*méconnait*] it, and that is what his entire behaviour really does express in spite of himself, in so far as he tries obscurely to recognise it. His life is oriented according to a problematic which isn't that of his actual experience, but that of his destiny, namely – what does his history signify?

Speech is mother to the misrecognised [*méconnue*] part of the subject, and that is the level peculiar to the analytic symptom – a level decentred in relation to individual experience, since it is that of the historical text which integrates it. From then on, what is certain is that the symptom will only give in to an intervention interceding at this decentred level. What will fail is any intervention inspired by a prefabricated reconstruction, one forged out of our notion of the normal development of the individual, and aiming at his normalisation – here is what he was lacking, here is what he must learn to submit to by way of frustration, for instance. What is at issue is knowing if the symptom is resolved in one register or in the other, there is no middle way.

The matter is nevertheless problematic in as much as the inter-ego dialogue cannot but include some reverberations, perhaps, why not – psychotherapeutic ones. Some kind of psychotherapy has always been practised, although no one knew quite what it was, and it has always involved the function of speech. What is at issue is determining whether, in analysis, this function of speech exerts its impact by substituting the authority of the analyst for the ego of the subject, or whether it is subjective. The order created by Freud demonstrates that the axial reality of the subject isn't in his ego. Intervening by substituting oneself for the ego of the subject, which is what is always done in one way of practising the analysis of resistances, is suggestion, not analysis.

The symptom, whatever it may be, isn't properly resolved when the analysis is practised without putting at the top of the agenda the question of ascertaining where the action of the analyst must be directed to, what point on the subject, if I can put it like that, he must aim at.

I'm going step by step. In the course of recent months, years even, I think I have sufficiently emphasized that the unconscious is the unknown subject of the ego, that it is misrecognised [*méconnu*] by the ego, which is *der Kern unseres Wesens*. Freud writes in the chapter of the *Traumdeutung* on the dream-processes, with which I have asked you to get acquainted – when Freud discusses the primary process, he means something having an ontological meaning, which he calls *the core of our being*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> (1900a) GW II/III 609; Stud II 572–3; SE V 603. The German word *Kern* is translated into English either as 'nucleus' (for instance, in the final chapter of Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*, in the phrase 'pathogenic nucleus', translated into French as '*noyau pathogène*', and rendered in Sem I as 'pathogenic nucleus') or, as in this passage, by 'core'. Occasionally 'kernel' may be found.

The core of our being does not coincide with the ego. That is the point of the analytic experience, and it is around this that our experience is organised, and around this that these strata of knowledge which are now being taught have been deposited. But do you think that we should be content with that, and say – the *I* of the unconscious subject is not *me* [*moi*]? That is not good enough, because nothing, for those of you who think spontaneously, if one can say that, implies the inverse. And normally you start thinking that this *I* is the real ego. You think that the ego is nothing but an incomplete, erroneous form of this *I*. In this way, you have accomplished the decentring essential to the Freudian discovery, but you have immediately reduced it. An experiment well known to oculists demonstrates the same diplopia. Put two images very close to one another, so that they are almost overlapping – thanks to a certain cross-eyedness, sometimes they make up a *single one*, *if they are brought close enough together*. Similarly, you force the ego back into this *I* discovered by Freud – you restore the unity.

That is what happened in analysis the day when realising that – for a reason which will have to be elucidated in retrospect – the first fruitfulness of the analytic discovery was being exhausted in the practice, people reverted to what is referred to as the analysis of the ego, claiming to find in it the exact inverse of what has to be demonstrated to the subject. Because one had already reached the level of the puzzle, of demonstration. People thought that by analysing the ego, one would find the reverse-side of whatever it was that had to be made comprehensible. In that way a reduction of the kind I just mentioned was effected – two different images into a single one.

There's no doubt that the real *I* is not the ego. But that isn't enough, for one can always fall into thinking that the ego is only a mistake of the *I*, a partial point of view, the mere becoming aware of which would be sufficient to broaden the perspective, sufficient for the reality which has to be reached in the analytic experience to reveal itself. What's important is the inverse, which must always be borne in mind – the ego isn't the *I*, isn't a mistake, in the sense in which classical doctrine makes of it a partial truth. It is something else – a particular object within the experience of the subject. Literally, the ego is an object – an object which fills a certain function which we here call the imaginary function.

This thesis is absolutely essential to technique. I defy you not to extract this conception from the reading of the post-1920 metapsychological texts. Freud's research on the second topography was undertaken in order to put back in its place an ego which had begun to slide back to its old position. Whereas, through an effort at mental accommodation, one was falling back into the essential element of the classical illusion – I do not say error, it is quite strictly an illusion. Everything Freud wrote aimed at reestablishing the exact perspective of the excentricity of the subject in relation to the ego.

I claim that this is the essential, and that everything must be organised in relation to it. Why? I will show you my cards starting with the a, b, c, even starting at the level of what is called, or what one falsely takes to be, the evidence.

## 2

Your evidence, the evidence of the psychological experience which is your own, is determined by a confusion of the concepts of which you know nothing. We live amongst concepts far more than we think. Its mode of reflection is essential to the manner in which the being of a certain cultural era gains a sense of itself, and by the same token conceives itself.

However, the elevated, highly elaborated character of the phenomenon of consciousness is conceded as a postulate by us all, each and everyone of us, in this year of 1954, and I am certain that there isn't a single one of us who isn't in the end convinced that, however partial the apprehension of consciousness, hence of the ego, may be, even so that is where our existence is given. We think that the unity of the ego is, if not explored, then at least apprehended in this fact of consciousness.

On the contrary, what the analytic experience highlights and what Freud doesn't know what to do with, like a fish with a fig, are the illusions of consciousness.

In his *Project* of 1895, Freud does not manage, even though it is easy, to locate precisely the phenomenon of consciousness in his already elaborated schema of the psychic apparatus. Much later, in the metapsychology, when he tries to explain the different pathological forms – dream, delirium, mental confusion, hallucinations – through investments of systems, he repeatedly finds himself confronted with a paradox when it is a matter of making the system of consciousness function, and he tells himself that it must have some special laws. The system of consciousness does not enter into his theory. Freud's psycho-physical conception of the investments of the intra-organic systems is extremely ingenious at explaining what takes place in the individual. However hypothetical it may be, what we have since acquired in the way of experience concerning the diffusion and distribution of nervous input rather goes to show the validity of Freud's biological construction. But for consciousness it doesn't work.

You are going to tell me – it proves that Freud was confused. We will consider the issue from another angle.

What gives consciousness its seemingly primordial character? The philosopher does indeed seem to start with an indisputable given when he takes as his starting point the transparency of consciousness to itself. If there is consciousness of something it cannot be, we are told, that this consciousness does not

itself grasp itself as such. Nothing can be experienced without the subject being able to be aware of himself within this experience in a kind of immediate reflection.

On this topic, doubtless, philosophers have taken a few steps forward since Descartes's decisive step. The question has been raised, and remains open, of knowing whether the *I* is immediately grasped in the field of consciousness. But one could already say of Descartes that he had differentiated the thetic consciousness from the non-thetic consciousness.

I won't go any deeper into the metaphysical investigation of the problem of consciousness. I am going to propose to you, not a working hypothesis – I claim that it isn't a hypothesis – but a way of being rid of it, of cutting the Gordian knot. For there are problems which one must resign oneself to abandon without having resolved.

Once again, we're dealing with a mirror.

What is the image in the mirror? The rays which return on to the mirror make us locate in an imaginary space the object which moreover is somewhere in reality. The real object isn't the object that you see in the mirror. So here there's a phenomenon of consciousness as such. That at any rate is what I would like you to accept, so that I can tell you a little apologue to aid your reflection.

Suppose all men to have disappeared from the world. I say *men* on account of the high value which you attribute to consciousness. That is already enough to raise the question – *What is left in the mirror?* But let us take it to the point of supposing that all living beings have disappeared. There are only waterfalls and springs left – lightning and thunder too. The image in the mirror, the image in the lake – do they still exist?

It is quite obvious that they still exist. For one very simple reason – at the high point of civilization we have attained, which far surpasses our illusions about consciousness, we have manufactured instruments which, without in any way being audacious, we can imagine to be sufficiently complicated to develop films themselves, put them away into little boxes, and store them in the fridge. Despite all living beings having disappeared, the camera can nonetheless record the image of the mountain in the lake, or that of the Café de Flore crumbling away in total solitude.<sup>2</sup>

Doubtless philosophers will have all kinds of cunning objections to make to me. But nevertheless I ask you to continue to listen to my apologue.

At this point the men return. It is an arbitrary act of Malebranche's God – since it is he who sustains us in every moment of our existence, there is no reason why he couldn't have obliterated us and a few centuries later put us back into circulation.

<sup>2</sup> The Café de Flore, on the Boulevard St Germain in Paris, was a favourite haunt of writers, artists and intellectuals, and later on of the existentialists, from the Second Empire on.

Perhaps men would have to learn everything anew, and especially how to read an image. It doesn't matter. What is certain is that – as soon as they saw on the film the image of the mountain, they would also see its reflection in the lake. They would also see the movements which took place on the mountain, and those of the image. We can take things further. If the machine were more complicated, a photo-electric cell focused on the image in the lake could cause an explosion – it is always necessary, for something to seem efficacious, for an explosion to take place somewhere – and another machine could record the echo or collect the energy of this explosion.

So then! this is what I want you to consider as being essentially a phenomenon of consciousness, which won't have been perceived by any ego, which won't have been reflected upon in any ego-like experience – any kind of ego and of consciousness of ego being absent at the time.

You'll tell me – *Just a minute though! The ego is somewhere, it's in the camera.* No, there's not a shadow of ego in the camera. But, on the other hand, I am quite happy to admit that there is an *I* in it – not in the camera – up to something in it.

I am explaining to you that it is in as much as he is committed to a play of symbols, to a symbolic world, that man is a decentred subject. Well, it is with this same play, this same world, that the machine is built. The most complicated machines are made only with words.

Speech is first and foremost that object of exchange whereby we are recognised, and because you have said the password, we don't break each other's necks, etc. That is how the circulation of speech begins, and it swells to the point of constituting the world of the symbol which makes algebraic calculations possible. The machine is the structure detached from the activity of the subject. The symbolic world is the world of the machine.

Then we have the question as to what, in this world, constitutes the being of the subject.

Some people get very worried when they see me referring to God. However it is a God we conceive of *ex machina*, unless we extract *machina ex Deo*.

The machine makes for the continuity, thanks to which the men who were absent for a while will have the recording of what, in the interim, took place in the way of phenomena of consciousness properly speaking. And there, I can speak of *phenomena of consciousness* without reifying any kind of cosmic soul, nor any presence in nature. For at the point we have got to, maybe because we are sufficiently committed to the manufacture of the machine, we've gone beyond confusing symbolic intersubjectivity with cosmic intersubjectivity. At least, I hope so.

I've not knocked this analogue together in order to develop a hypothesis, but as an act of salubrity. Just to start raising the question as to what the ego is requires one to detach oneself from what we might call the religious conception

of consciousness. Implicitly, modern man thinks that everything which has happened in the universe since its origin came about so as to converge on this thing which thinks, creation of life, unique, precious being, pinnacle of creation, which is himself, with this privileged vantage-point called consciousness.

This perspective leads to an anthropomorphism which is so deluded that one has to start by shedding the scales from one's eyes, so as to realise what kind of illusion one has fallen prey to. This is a newcomer for humanity, this idiocy of scientific atheism. Since within science one denies anything that could be considered as a recourse to the supreme Being, one ends up with vertigo, taking refuge elsewhere – to end up doing the very same thing, prostrating oneself. Here, there is nothing left to understand, everything is explained – consciousness has to appear, the world, history converge on this marvel, contemporary man, you and me, us men in the street.

The purely sentimental, in truth incoherent atheism of scientific thought is pushed on the rebound into making consciousness the high-point of all phenomena. It strives as much as it can – just as one turns too absolute a king into a constitutional one – to make it clear that this consciousness is the masterpiece of masterpieces, the explanation for everything, perfection. But these epiphenomena are useless. When one deals with phenomena, one always acts as if one didn't take them into account.

This very precaution of not taking them into account underlines the fact that if you don't destroy its importance, you will become a cretin – you won't be able to think of anything else. I won't go on about the contradictory and hazardous varieties of aversions, of prejudices, of so-called inclinations for introducing forces, or vitalist entities, as they are called etc. But when one speaks in embryology of the formative force taking effect in the embryo, right away one assumes that since there is an organising centre there can be only one consciousness. Consciousness, eyes, ears – so then there is a little demon inside the embryo. So one no longer tries to organise what is apparent in the phenomenon, since one thinks that everything which is superior implies consciousness. However we do know that consciousness is linked to something entirely contingent, just as contingent as the surface of a lake in an uninhabited world – the existence of our eyes or of our ears.

To be sure, there is something unthinkable about this, an impasse in which all kinds of things come together, which seem to be organised in a contradictory manner in the mind. Common sense has reacted against them with a number of taboos. These are premises. Behaviourism says – *As for us, we're going to observe total behaviour, we're not going to pay any attention to consciousness.* But we know full well that this putting of consciousness into brackets wasn't that fruitful.

Consciousness isn't the monster one makes it out to be. Excluding it, chaining it up, doesn't bring any real benefits. Moreover, it has been said for some time now that behaviourism, under the alias of molar-behaviourism, has

reintroduced it on the sly. Following Freud, they have learned to make use of the notion of the field. Without that, the little progress behaviourism has been able to make hinges around the fact that it was agreed to observe a series of phenomena at their own particular level – at the level, for instance, of behaviour taken as a whole, considered in an object constituted as such – without worrying too much what their elementary instruments, inferior or superior, were. It isn't any the less the case that in the very notion of behaviour there is a certain castration of human reality. Not because it doesn't take into account the notion of consciousness, which, in fact, is of absolutely no use to anyone, neither to those who use it, nor to those who don't – but because it eliminates the intersubjective relation, which is the foundation not only of behaviour, but of actions and of passions. That has nothing to do with consciousness.

I hope you'll consider – for a certain time, during this introduction – consciousness to occur each time – and it occurs in the most unexpected and disparate places – there's a surface such that it can produce what is called *an image*. That is a materialist definition.

An image – that means the effects of energy starting from a given point of the real – think of them as being like light, since that is what most clearly evokes an image in our mind – are reflected at some point on a surface, come to strike the corresponding same point in space. The surface of a lake might just as well be replaced by the *area striata* of the occipital lobe, for the *area striata* with its fibrillary layers is exactly like a mirror. In the same way as you don't need the entire surface of a mirror – if that actually means anything – for you to be aware of the content of a field or a room, in the same way as you obtain the same result by using a tiny little bit, so any small portion of the *area striata* can be put to the same use, and behaves like a mirror. All sorts of things in the world behave like mirrors. All that's needed is that the conditions be such that to one point of a reality there should correspond an effect at another point, that a bi-univocal correspondence occurs between two points in real space.

I say in real space – I'm going too fast. There are two cases – either the effects occur in real space, or else they occur in imaginary space. Earlier on I showed what happens in a point in imaginary space, in order to unsettle your habitual conceptions. In this way you can realise that everything which is imaginary, everything which is properly speaking illusory, isn't for all that subjective.

There are illusions that are perfectly objective, objectifiable, and it isn't necessary to make the whole of our distinguished company disappear for you to understand that.

unity of the latter, is precisely what the immediacy of sensation is in tension with. This unity isn't at all homogenous with what happens at the surface of the field, which is neutral. Consciousness as a physical phenomenon is precisely what engenders this tension.

The entire dialectic which I have given you as an example under the name of the *mirror stage* is based on the relation between, on the one hand, a certain level of tendencies which are experienced – let us say, for the moment, at a certain point in life – as disconnected, discordant, in pieces – and there's always something of that that remains – and on the other hand, a unity with which it is merged and paired. It is in this unity that the subject for the first time knows himself as a unity, but as an alienated, virtual unity. It does not partake in the characteristics of inertia of the phenomenon of consciousness under its primitive form, on the contrary, it has a vital, or anti-vital, relation with the subject.

It seems that this experience is a privileged one for man. Perhaps there is, after all, something of the kind in other animal species. That isn't a crucial issue for us. Let us not feign any hypotheses. This dialectic is found in experience at every level of structuration of the human ego, and that is enough for us.

So that you gain a firm grasp on this dialectic, I would like to give you a representation of it in an image whose outline you have not yet had time to wear down, since I haven't given you it yet, that of the blind man and the paralytic.<sup>3</sup>

Subjectivity on the level of the ego is comparable to this couple, which was introduced by the imagery of the fifteenth century – no doubt not without reason – in a particularly emphatic manner. The subjective half of the pre-mirror experience is the paralytic, who cannot move about by himself except in an uncoordinated and clumsy way. What masters him is the image of the ego, which is blind, and which carries him. Contrary to all appearances, and this is where the entire problem of the dialectic lies, it isn't, as Plato thinks, the master who rides the horse, that is, the slave, it's the other way round. And the paralytic, whose perspective this is, can only identify with his unity in a fascinated fashion, in the fundamental immobility whereby he finishes up corresponding to the gaze he is under, the blind gaze.

There's another image, that of the snake and the bird, fascinated by the gaze. Fascination is absolutely essential to the phenomenon of the constitution of the ego. The uncoordinated, incoherent diversity of the primitive fragmentation gains its unity in so far as it is fascinated. Reflection is also fascination, jamming. I will show you this function of fascination, of terror even, under Freud's pen, precisely in discussing the constitution of the ego.

A third image. If machines could embody what's at stake in this dialectic, I would offer you the following model.

<sup>3</sup> See Freud (1905c) GW VI 34; Stud IV 36; SE VIII 34.

Take one of these small turtles or foxes, which we have known how to make for some time, and which are the playthings of the scientists of our time – automata have always played a very great role, and they are playing a revived role in our time – one of those small machines which we now know, thanks to all kinds of intermediary organs, how to furnish with homeostasis and something like desires. Let us suppose that this machine is constituted in such a way that it is incomplete, and will jam, will only be definitively structured as a mechanism once it perceives – by whatever means, a photo-electric cell, for instance, with relays – another machine identical to itself, with the sole difference being that it would have already perfected its unity through what we may call a prior experience – a machine can have experience. The movement of each machine is thus conditioned by the perception of a certain stage attained by another. That is what corresponds to the element of fascination.

You see, by the same token, how a circle can be set up. As long as the unity of the first machine hangs on that of the other, as long as the other gives it the model and even the form of its unity, whatever it is that the first is oriented towards will always depend on what the other is oriented towards.

What will result from this is nothing less than the situation of impasse which is that of the constitution of the human object. The latter, in fact, hangs entirely on this dialectic of jealousy-sympathy, expressed precisely in traditional psychology by the incompatibility of consciousnesses. This doesn't mean that one consciousness cannot conceive another, but that an ego which hangs completely on the unity of another ego is strictly incompatible with it on the plane of desire. An apprehended, desired object, it's either he or I who will get it, it has to be one or the other. And when the other gets it it's because it belongs to me.

This rivalry, which is constitutive of knowledge in the pure state, is obviously a virtual stage. There is no such thing as knowledge in the pure state, for the strict community of ego and other in desiring the object initiates something completely different, namely recognition.

Recognition obviously presupposes a third thing. For the first machine which is jammed on the image of the second to be able to come to an agreement, for them not to be forced to destroy themselves on account of the convergence of their desire – which in fact is the same desire, since at this level they are one and the same being – it would be necessary for the little machine to *inform* the other, to say to it – *I desire that*. That's impossible. Admitting that there is an *I* would immediately turn it into *you desire that*. *I desire that* means – *You, the other, who is my unity, you desire that*.

It may be thought that here we have rediscovered that essential form of the human message whereby one receives one's own message from the other in an inverted form. Don't believe that for one moment. What I am telling you now is purely mythical. The first machine has no means of saying anything

whatsoever, for it is prior to unity, it is immediate desire, it has no speech, it is no one. It is no more anyone than the reflection of the mountain in the lake is. The paralytic is aphonic, he has nothing to say. For something to become established, it would require the presence of a third, placed inside the machine, the first one, for instance, pronouncing an *I*. But this is quite unthinkable at this level of experience.

However, this third party is what we find in the unconscious. But that's it, it is in the unconscious – there where it must be located for the ballet of all the little machines to get going, namely above them, in this elsewhere in which, as Claude Lévi-Strauss told us the other day, the system of exchanges is to be found, the elementary structures. It is necessary for the symbolic system to intervene in the system conditioned by the image of the ego so that an exchange can take place, something which isn't knowledge [*connaissance*], but recognition [*reconnaissance*].

That shows you that the ego can in no way be anything other than an imaginary function, even if at a certain level it determines the structuration of the subject. It is as ambiguous as the object itself, of which it is in some way, not only a stage, but the identical correlate.

The subject sets itself up as operating, as human, as *I*, from the moment the symbolic system appears. And this moment cannot be deduced from any model of the order of individual structuration. To put it another way, for the human subject to appear, it would be necessary for the machine, in the information it gives, to take account of itself, as one unity amongst others. That is precisely the one thing it cannot do. To be capable of taking itself into account, it would have to be something more than the machine it in fact is, because one can do anything, except get a machine to include itself as an element in a calculation.

Next time, I will talk about things from a less arid angle. The ego isn't just a function. From the moment when the symbolic system is constituted, it can itself be used as a symbol, and that is what we are considering.

As we want the ego to be the subject, as we unify it as function and as symbol, today we have had to busy ourselves divesting it of its fascinating symbolic status, which makes us believe in it. Next time we will restore this status to it, and we will see the strict relevance all this has for our practice.

8 December 1954

# Homeostasis and insistence

IDOLATRY

SELF-COUNTING OF THE SUBJECT

HETEROTOPIA OF CONSCIOUSNESS

THE ANALYSIS OF THE EGO ISN'T THE ANALYSIS OF THE  
UNCONSCIOUS INSIDE OUT

If I wanted to find an image for whatever it is we are investigating here, I would begin by rejoicing in the fact that given the accessibility of Freud's work I do not find myself forced, save by some unexpected intervention of the deity, to go and seek them on some Sinai, in other words to leave you by yourselves too soon. In actual fact, what we always see being reproduced in the most tightly argued parts of Freud's text is something which, while it isn't quite the adoration of the Golden Calf, is still an idolatry. What I am trying to do here is tear you away from it once and for all. I hope that I will do enough so that one day your tendency to use highly imagistic formulations will disappear.

In his presentation yesterday evening, our dear Leclaire did not quite prostrate himself before the calf, but there was a bit of that in it. You all felt it, the tenor of some of his terms of reference is of that order. The need to give an image certainly has its merits in scientific presentation no less than in other domains – but maybe not as much as one thinks. And nowhere does it offer more traps than in the domain we find ourselves in, which is that of subjectivity. When one speaks of subjectivity, the problem is not to turn the subject into an entity.

I think that, with the aim of making his constructions hold up – and it is indeed this aim which accounts for the fact that he presented his model to us as a pyramid, firmly seated on its bottom, and not on its tip – Leclaire made the subject into some sort of idol. There was no other way he could do it than represent it for us.

This remark comes up at the right moment in the course of our demonstration here, which is centred on the question – *What is the subject?* – raised both by a naive understanding and by the scientific, or philosophical, formulation of the subject.

Let us take up the discussion at the point where I left you last time, that is at the moment when the subject grasps his unity.

## 1

The body in pieces finds its unity in the image of the other, which is its own anticipated image – a dual situation in which a polar, but non-symmetrical relation, is sketched out. This asymmetry already tells us that the theory of the ego in psychoanalysis has nothing in common with the learned conception of the ego, which on the contrary partakes of a kind of naive understanding which I told you was peculiar to the historically datable psychology of modern man.

I brought you up short at the moment when I was showing you that this subject, really, is no one.

The subject is no one. It is decomposed, in pieces. And it is jammed, sucked in by the image, the deceiving and realised image, of the other, or equally by its own specular image. That is where it finds its unity. Laying hold of a reference taken from the most modern of these mechanistic problems, which have such importance in the development of science and of thought, I'll show you this stage of development of the subject by using a model whose utility is that it doesn't in any way idolise the subject.

At the point where I left you, the subject was nowhere. We had our two little mechanical tortoises, one of which was stuck on the image of the other. We were in effect supposing that, through a regulative part of its mechanism – the photoelectric cell, for instance, but let's leave that, I'm not here to tell you about cybernetics, even an imaginary variety – the first machine was dependent on the image of the second, hanging on its unitary functioning, and consequently captivated by its procedures. Hence a circle, which can be vast, but whose essential set-up is given by this imaginary dual relation.

I showed you the consequences of this circle regarding desire. Let us be clear – what could the desire of a machine be, except to restock on energy sources? A machine can scarcely do anything other than feed itself, and that is indeed what Grey Walter's courageous little animals do. Machines which reproduce themselves have yet to be built, and have yet even to be conceived of – the schema of their symbolic has not even been established. The sole object of desire which we can presume of a machine is therefore its source of nourishment. Well then, if each machine is intent on the point to which the other is going, somewhere there will necessarily be a collision.

That is where we had got to.

Now let us suppose our machines to have some sound recording equipment, and let us suppose that a loud voice – we can easily imagine that someone supervises their operation, the legislator – intervenes so as to regulate the ballet which up until now was only a round which might lead to a disastrous end. What's being introduced is a symbolic regulation, of which the unconscious mathematical subjacency of the exchanges of the elementary structures gives

us the schema. The comparison ends there, for we aren't going to make an entity of the legislator – that would be yet another idol.

DR LECLAIRE: *I'm sorry, but I'd like to reply. If I have a tendency to idolise the subject, it's because I think it necessary – you can't do otherwise.*

Well, then, you are a little idolator. I come down from Sinai and break the Tables of the Law.

DR LECLAIRE: *Let me finish. I have the impression that in refusing this deliberate entification, the subject, we have a tendency, and you have a tendency, to carry this idolisation over to another point. At that moment, it won't be the subject, it will be the other, the image, the mirror.*

I realise this. You aren't the only one. You and your transcendental preoccupations lead you to a specifically substantialist idea of the unconscious. Others have an idealist conception, in the sense of critical idealism, but they also think that I reintroduce what I am chasing away. There is more than one person here whose formation is in, let us say, traditional philosophy, and for whom consciousness's awareness of itself is one of the pillars of his conception of the world. That is doubtless something which shouldn't be treated lightly, and last time I did warn you that I was taking the step of cutting the Gordian knot, by deliberately being partial and radically neglecting one entire point of view. Someone here, whose identity I have no need to disclose, said to me after my last lecture – *This consciousness, it seems to me that after having badly maltreated it you bring it back in with this voice which reintroduces order, and which regulates the ballet of the machines.*

Our deduction of the subject however demands that we locate this voice somewhere in the interhuman game. To say that it is the legislator's voice would doubtless be an idolification, albeit of a high, though characterised, order. Isn't it rather the voice *Which knows itself when it resounds/No longer to be no one's voice/But that of the waves and the woods?*<sup>1</sup>

It's language Valéry is speaking of here. And shouldn't we perhaps in the end recognise it, this voice, as *the voice of no one*.

That is why I undertook to tell you last time that we are led to require that it be the machine which speaks commandingly. And, moving on a bit faster, as happens sometimes at the end of a discourse when I am forced both to tie it up and initiate its resumption, I said the following – suppose that the machine could take itself into account [*se compter elle-même*]. In fact, for the mathematical combinations which control object exchange to function, in the

<sup>1</sup> Paul Valéry, 'La Pythie' in *Oeuvres I*. Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1957, p. 136: 'Qui se connaît quand elle sonne/N'être plus la voix de personne/Tant que des ondes et des bois.'

sense in which I defined them earlier, it is necessary that in the combinatory each of the machines be able to count itself.

What do I mean by that?

## 2

When does the individual in his subjective function take himself into account – if not in the unconscious? One of the most obvious phenomena discovered by the Freudian experience is exactly that.

Think of that very strange game Freud mentions at the end of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, which consists in inviting the subject to say numbers at random.<sup>2</sup> The associations which then come to him bring to light significations which reverberate so neatly with his remembrance, his destiny, that, from the point of view of probabilities, what he chose goes well beyond anything we might expect from pure chance.

If philosophers warn me against the materialisation of the phenomenon of consciousness, which would make us lose a precious handhold when it comes to grasping the radical originality of the subject – this is in a world structured à la Kant, even à la Hegel, for Hegel did not abandon the central function of consciousness, although he does allow us to free ourselves from it – for my part, I would warn philosophers against an illusion which has some affinity with what is highlighted by this extraordinarily significant, amusing, period-piece of a test, called the Binet and Simon.

The plan is to detect the mental age of a subject – a mental age which in fact isn't that changeable – by putting absurd sentences to him, amongst which there's this one – *I have three brothers, Paul, Ernest and me*. There certainly is an illusion of this order in believing that the fact that the subject takes himself into account is an operation of consciousness, an operation attached to an intuition of a consciousness transparent to itself. Besides, the model of it is not unequivocal, and not all philosophers have described it in the same way.

I don't presume to criticise the way in which Descartes does it, because the dialectic is there governed by an aim, the demonstration of the existence of God, in such a way that in the end, it is in arbitrarily isolating the cogito that one gives it a fundamental existential value. However, it wouldn't be difficult to show that, from the existentialist point of view, the grasp of consciousness by itself, at the limit, loses its moorings in any kind of existential apprehension of the ego. The ego only figures in it as a particular experience, tied to objectifiable conditions, within the limits of the inspection that is believed simply enough to be this reflection of consciousness on itself. And the phenomenon of consciousness has no privileged character in such an apprehension.

<sup>2</sup> GW IV 268–72; SE VI 240–3

The issue is how to free our notion of consciousness of any mortgage as regards the subject's apprehension of itself. It is a phenomenon which is, I wouldn't say contingent in relation to our deduction of the subject, but heterotopic, and that is why I gave myself and you the pleasure of showing you a model of it in the physical world itself. Invariably you'll see consciousness appear with very great irregularity in subjective phenomena. In the reversal of perspective which analysis imposes, its presence always appears tied to conditions which are more physical, material, than psychic.

Thus, doesn't the register of consciousness enter into the phenomenon of the dream? A dream is conscious. This imaginary iridescence, these moving images, this is something which belongs entirely to the same order as that illusory aspect of the image on which we insist in relation to the formation of the ego. The dream is very much akin to reading in the mirror, a most ancient means of divination, which can also be used in the technique of hypnosis. In becoming fascinated by a mirror, and preferably by a mirror as it has always been since the beginning of humanity until a relatively recent period, more obscure than clear, mirror of burnished metal, the subject may succeed in revealing to himself many of the elements of his imaginary fixations. Well then, where does that leave consciousness? In what direction to look for it, to locate it? In more than one passage in his work, Freud puts the problem in terms of psychic tension, and attempts to find out by what mechanisms the system of consciousness is invested or disinvested. His speculation – see the *Project* and the *Metapsychology*<sup>3</sup> – leads him to consider that there is a discursive necessity for holding the system of consciousness to be excluded from the dynamic of the systems of the psyche. The problem remains unresolved for him, and he leaves to the future the task of giving to this matter a clarity which eludes him. He evidently ends up in an impasse.

So we are thus confronted with the necessity of a third pole, which is exactly what our friend Leclaire was trying to argue yesterday evening with his triangular schema.

We do indeed need a triangle. But there are a thousand ways of acting on a triangle. It isn't necessarily a solid figure resting on an intuition. It is just as much a system of relations. In mathematics, we only really begin to deal with the triangle, for instance, once none of its sides is privileged.

So here we are, in search of the subject in so far as it takes itself into account. The question is to know where it is. That it is in the unconscious, at least so far as we analysts are concerned, is the point which I believe I've led you to and which I am now reaching myself.

<sup>3</sup> *Méta-psychologie* is the French title of a collection of articles which includes Freud (1912g) and the papers published in SE XIV under the title *Metapsychology*; it does not include *The Ego and the Id*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, etc.

**M. LEFÈBRE-PONTALIS:** *Just a word, since I think I recognise myself as the anonymous interlocutor who drew your attention to the fact that you were only conjuring consciousness away at the beginning to find it again all the more at the end. I never said that the cogito was an untouchable truth, and that one could define the subject by this experience of complete transparency of self to itself. I never said that consciousness entirely exhausted subjectivity, which would in any event be rather difficult given phenomenology and psychoanalysis, but simply that the cogito represented a sort of model of subjectivity, that is to say rendered quite apparent the idea that there must be somebody for whom the word like has a meaning. And that, you appeared to omit. For when you went into your apologue about the disappearance of men, you forgot one thing, which is that men had to return in order to grasp the relation between the reflection and the thing reflected. Otherwise, if one considers the object in itself and the film recorded by the camera, it is nothing other than an object. It isn't a witness, it's nothing. Similarly, in the example you proposed of so-called random numbers, for the subject to realise that these numbers which he said at random are really not as random as all that, requires that there be a phenomenon, which we can call whatever you like, but which seems to me in fact to be this consciousness. It isn't just the reflection of what the other said to him. I really can't see why it is so important to demolish consciousness if it is to bring it back in at the end.*

It's not the demolition of consciousness that's important – we aren't here to produce great crashings of glass. What's important is the extreme difficulty the analytic experience has in giving the system of consciousness a formulation within the order which Freud calls the energetic reference, to locate it in the interplay of different psychic systems.

The central object of our study this year is the ego. This ego is to be stripped of the privilege which it receives from a certain kind of evidence, concerning which I try to underline for you in a thousand different ways that it is only a historical contingency. The place which it has taken up in philosophical deduction is one of the clearest manifestations of that. The notion of the ego today draws its self-evidential character from a certain prestige given to consciousness in so far as it is a unique, individual, irreducible experience. The intuition of the ego retains, in so far as it is centred on the experience of consciousness, a captivating character, which one must rid oneself of in order to accede to our conception of the subject. I try to lead you away from its attraction with the aim of allowing you to grasp at last where, according to Freud, the reality of the subject is. In the unconscious, excluded from the system of the ego, the subject speaks.

say that it was the only organised thing in the psyche – and the system of the unconscious? Is there opposition like that of a yes and a no, of a reversal, of a pure and simple negation? Doubtless the ego makes a great many things known to us by means of the *Verneinung*. Why, while we are at it, couldn't we simply go on to read the unconscious by changing the sign of everything that is said? We haven't got to that point yet, but something analogous has been done.

Freud's introduction of his new topography has been understood as a return to the good old ego – texts by some of the best analysts attest to that, including Anna Freud's *Defence Mechanisms*, written ten years later. There was a true liberation, an explosion of joy – *Ah, it's back, we can busy ourselves with it again, not only do we have the right to, but it is recommended*. That is how Miss Freud expresses herself in the *Defence Mechanisms*. It must be said that being concerned with something other than the ego was felt by analysts, so strange an experience was it to them, like a defence against being concerned with the ego.

Obviously Freud always talked about the ego. And this function always greatly interested him, as external to the subject. In the analysis of resistances do we have the equivalent of what we call the analysis of material? Is working on the procedures of the ego, or exploring the unconscious, of the same order? Are the two systems complementary? Are they the same with a change of sign, just about? Are the unconscious and what thwarts its revelation, are they like the inside out and the right side up? If that is the case, then it is legitimate to speak, as one analyst, Sandor Rado, has dared to, of unconscious egology.

I am alluding to his very pretty article, in the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, Volume VIII, which places the *rid* principle<sup>4</sup> in the foreground, as the essential king-pin of this egology. This is a principle new to analytic theory, and you will rediscover it again under a thousand different guises, because this is in reality the one which at present directs the activity of most analysts. *To rid*<sup>4</sup> means to *free oneself of something, to rid of*,<sup>4</sup> to avoid. This new principle is meant to govern every manifestation of the subject, from top to bottom. It presides over the most elementary processes of stimulus-response – the frog gets rid of a little bit of acid which you've put on its leg by means of a reflex, the spinal character of which can easily be shown by cutting off its nodule – as it does over the reactions of the ego. It goes without saying that references to consciousness are completely abandoned, and it is only for heuristic purposes that I have proceeded as I have. That is an extremist position, particularly useful because it makes explicit in a coherent manner ideas which are usually hidden. Now, if Freud does have something to say when he introduces his new topography, it is precisely the opposite. The point for him is to remind us of the fact that not only is there an absolute dissymmetry between the subject of the unconscious and the organisation of the ego, but also a radical difference.

\* English in the original.

Please read Freud. You are going to have three weeks. And while worshipping the Golden Calf, keep a small book of the law in your hand, read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with the introduction I am giving you as a small key. You'll see that either it makes not the least bit of sense or it has exactly the sense I say it has.

From when we started up to the present, Freud says, we took as a principle that the psychic apparatus, in so far as it is organised, is to be placed between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Freud, of course, in his thinking isn't inclined to idolification. It never occurred to him that there wasn't a pleasure principle in the reality principle. For if you follow reality, it is only because the reality principle is a delayed-action pleasure principle. Conversely, if the pleasure principle exists, it is in conformity to some reality – this reality is psychic reality.

If the psyche has any meaning, if there is a reality which is called psychic reality, or, in other words, if living beings exist, it is in so far as there is an internal organisation which up to a certain point tends to oppose the free and unlimited passage of forces and discharges of energy, such as we may assume to exist, in a purely theoretical way, intercrossing in the inanimate reality. There is a closed precinct, within which a certain equilibrium is maintained, through the action of a mechanism which we now call homeostasis, which absorbs, moderates the irruption of quantities of energy coming from the external world.

Let us call this regulation the *restitutive function of the psychic organisation*. At a very elementary level, the frog's leg gives us an idea of it. Not only is there discharge, but withdrawal – which testifies to the still very primitive functioning of a principle of restitution, of equilibration of the machine.

Freud doesn't have the term homeostasis. he uses that of inertia, and that is an echo of Fechnerism. Do you know that there are two sides to Fechner? On one side, he is the psycho-physicist, asserting that only the principles of physics can allow one to symbolise psychic processes. But there is another side of Fechner, which few people know, which is quite unique. He goes a long way down the path of universal subjectivisation, and would no doubt have given a realist reading of my little apologue the other day, which was very far from being my intention. I wasn't telling you that the reflection of the mountain in the lake was a dream of the cosmos, but you would be able to find that in Fechner.

Discharge and return to the position of equilibrium – this law of regulation is valid for both systems, says Freud. But by the same token he is led to ask himself – what is the relation between these two systems? Is it simply that what is pleasure in the one is unpleasure in the other, and vice versa? If the two systems were the inverse of one another, one should be able to arrive at a general law of equilibrium, and on that account, there would be an analysis of the ego which would be the analysis of the unconscious inside out. That, put in a theoretical way, is the problem I put to you earlier.

This is where Freud realises that something doesn't satisfy the pleasure principle. He realises that what comes out of one of the systems – that of the unconscious – has a very particular insistence – that is the word I wanted to bring in. I say *insistence* because it expresses rather well, in a familiar way, the meaning of what has been translated into French as *automatisme de répétition*, *Wiederholungswang* [compulsion to repeat]. The word *automatisme* has resonances for us of the complete ascendancy of neurology. That isn't how it should be understood. What it is is a compulsion to repeat [*compulsion à la répétition*], and that is why I think I am making it concrete by introducing the notion of insistence.

This system has something disturbing about it. It is dissymmetrical. It doesn't quite fit. Something in it eludes the system of equations and the evidence borrowed from the forms of thought of the register of energetics as they were introduced in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Yesterday evening, Professor Lagache brought out for you, a bit quickly, Condillac's statue. I cannot recommend the rereading of the *Traité des Sensations* too highly. Firstly, because it is an absolutely delightful read, with an inimitable period style. In it, you will see that my primitive state of a subject to be found everywhere, and which in some sense is the visual image, has some sort of ancestry. In Condillac, the scent of the rose seems a very solid starting-point, out of which the entire psychic edifice has to be drawn, without any apparent difficulty, like a rabbit from a hat.

The jumps in his reasoning give us cause for consternation, but that wasn't the case for his contemporaries – Condillac wasn't deluded. Why, it must be asked, doesn't he give an explicit formulation to the pleasure principle? Because, as M. de la Palice would reply,<sup>5</sup> he didn't have a formula for it, because he came before the steam engine. The era of the steam engine, its industrial exploitation, and administrative projects and balance-sheets, were needed, for us to ask the question – what does a machine yield?

For Condillac, as for others, more comes out than was put in. They were metaphysicians. Whatever one makes of it – my usual discourse isn't generally coloured by a progressivist tendency – one must admit that new things do emerge in the symbolic order. At some point it was realised that to draw the rabbit out of the hat you always have to have put it in beforehand. That is the principle of energetics, and that is why energetics is also a metaphysics.

It is the principle of homeostasis which obliges Freud to inscribe all his deductions in terms of investment, charge, discharge, energy relations between different systems. However, he realises that something doesn't work in all this. That's what *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is about, no more no less.

At first, he picks up on a very local point, the well-known phenomenon of the

<sup>5</sup> M. de la Palice is the purveyor of truisms.

repetition of dreams in cases of traumatic neuroses, which contravene the rule of the pleasure principle, in as much as for dreams it is embodied in the principle of the imaginary fulfilment of desire. Freud asks himself – *Why on earth is there an exception in this particular case?* But one sole exception can't put into question something as fundamental as the pleasure principle, which is the principle of regulation which enables one to inscribe the concrete functioning of man considered as a machine in a coherent system of symbolic formulations. This principle isn't deduced from his theory, it forms the basis of his thought in as much as in his time one thought in that particular register. So if you read this text, you will see that among the different exceptions he mentions, none seems to him quite sufficient to put the principle into question. But the exceptions, taken as a whole, seem to him to converge.

You were telling me earlier on that I would end up by getting ship-wrecked on a reef, and that somewhere we'll meet up with this subject, in the form of an idol. Are we playing hunt-the-slipper here? Anyway, that is what Freud is playing. For the very phenomenon on which analysis is based is the following – aiming at remembering, and whether we encounter it or not, we come upon the reproduction, in the guise of the transference, of something which manifestly belongs to the other system.

*DR LECLAIRE: I would like to answer all at once, because I feel somewhat got at. I think that you are reproaching me a great deal for having pulled the rabbit out of the hat in which I had placed it. But really, I'm not so sure that it was me who put it there. I did pull it out, true, but it wasn't me who put it in. That is the first thing I had to say to you, but that's not all. The second is this. Regarding the subject of the unconscious, you have accused me of idolification; however, I said that I was representing it, even though to be rigorous, it, like Jehovah, should be neither represented, nor named. Nonetheless, I did represent it, knowing what I was doing. I have the feeling you carry this idolification over from one side to the other.*

Dear Leclaire, it seems to me that many people here may not have felt that you were put on the line to the extent you feel you were. Of course, I acknowledge and indeed admire the fact that you did things as you say you did, knowing what you were doing. What you did last night was very much under control, you knew perfectly well what you were doing, you didn't do it innocently. That is greatly to your credit. Having said that, we are going to see whether what you are suggesting now is true. What you forewarned me would be a reef is more than avoidable – it's already avoided.

*DR LECLAIRE: I simply have the feeling that this phenomenon of avoidance is reproduced every time we speak of the subject. Every time, it is a kind of reaction, when we speak of the subject.*

What do you mean by avoidance?

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DR LECLAIRE: *Riddance*,<sup>6</sup> just that.

Let us not get side-tracked here please. It isn't the same avoidance.

There is a restitutive function, which is that of the pleasure principle. But there is also a repetitive function. How do they fit together?

The subject may reproduce one experience indefinitely, some characteristics of which are discovered through remembering. Lord knows what difficulty you have in apprehending what satisfaction the subject gains from it. I already explained this to you some years back, in relation to the *Wolfman*. What is this insistence on the part of the subject to reproduce? Reproduce what? Is it in his behaviour? Is it in his fantasies? Is it in his character? Is it even in his ego? All kinds of things, from entirely different registers, can be used as material and as elements in this reproduction.

The reproduction in the transference within analysis is obviously only a particular case of a far more diffuse reproduction, which we take on in what is called character analysis, analysis of the total personality, and other nonsenses.

Freud asks himself what the inexhaustible nature of this reproduction means, from the point of view of the pleasure principle. Does it occur because of something unruly, or does it obey a different, more fundamental principle?

I leave the question open – what is the nature of the principle which governs what is at issue, namely the subject? Is it assimilable, reducible, symbolisable? Is it something? Or can it neither be named, nor grasped, but only structured?

This will be the theme of the lectures for our next term.

15 December 1954

<sup>6</sup> English in the original.

# VI

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## Freud, Hegel and the machine

THE DEATH INSTINCT  
FREUD'S RATIONALISM  
THE MASTER'S ALIENATION  
PSYCHOANALYSIS IS NOT A HUMANISM  
FREUD AND ENERGY

You have been spoilt. M. Hyppolite gave you something good yesterday evening. Now the question is to know what you are going to do with it.

Some of you may still have a mnemonic trace of what I left you with at the end of our last talk, namely the *Wiederholungszwang* – which we will translate as *compulsion de répétition* [compulsion to repeat] rather than *automatisme de répétition*. This *Zwang* was singled out by Freud right from the start of his writings, the last to be made public, in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* to which I frequently allude, an analysis and critique of which we must undertake here in the weeks to come.

What Freud then defined as the pleasure principle is a principle of constancy. There is another principle, which our theoretician-analysts are as nonplussed by as a fish by a fig, the Nirvana principle. It is remarkable to see how, in the writings of an author like Hartmann, the three terms – principle of constancy, pleasure principle, Nirvana principle – are totally identified, as if Freud had never shifted out of the one mental category with which he sought to put a construction on the facts, and as if it were always the same thing he was talking about. One wonders why all of a sudden he would have called the Nirvana principle the beyond of the pleasure principle.

At the beginning of *Beyond*, Freud gives us a representation of two systems, and shows us that what is pleasure in the one is translated into pain in the other, and conversely. Now, if there were symétry, reciprocity, a perfect coupling up of the two systems, if the primary and secondary processes were in fact the converse of one another, they would simply become one, and it would be enough to work on one to work on the other at the same time. In working on the ego and resistance, one would by the same token get at the heart of the problem. Freud wrote *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* precisely to explain that the matter can't be left like that.

Indeed, the manifestation of the primary process at the level of the ego, in the form of a symptom, is translated into unpleasure, suffering, and yet, it always

returns. This fact alone should give us pause for thought. Why does the repressed system manifest itself with such insistence, as I called it last time? If the nervous system is set to reach a position of equilibrium, why doesn't it attain it? These matters, when put like that, are so obvious.

But that's the point, Freud was a man who, once he had seen something – and he knew how to see, and be the first – would not lose sight of the cutting edge. And that is what makes for the prodigious value of his work. Of course, no sooner had he made a discovery than it would immediately be set upon by the work of gnawing away which always takes place around any kind of speculative novelty, and tends to make everything fit back into the routine. Just look at the first great original notion he contributed at the purely theoretical level, the libido, and the mark, the irreducible character he gives it by saying – *libido is sexual*. These days, in order to make ourselves understood, we would have to say that what Freud put forward is that the essential motor of human progress, the motor of the pathetic, of the conflictual, of the fruitful, of the creative in human life, is lust. And already, after only ten years, there was Jung ready to explain that libido is psychic interest. No, libido is sexual libido. When I speak of the libido, I am speaking of the sexual libido.

What everyone acknowledges as the turning-point in the technique of analysis, centring on resistance, was well-founded and proved its fertility, but it lent itself to a theoretical confusion – by working on the ego, it was thought that one was working on one of the two halves of the apparatus. At this point in time, Freud chose to remind us that the unconscious as such cannot be reached and makes itself known in a fashion which is paradoxical, painful, and cannot be reduced to the pleasure principle. He thus brings back into the foreground the essence of his discovery, which one tends to forget.

Have you read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*? If one of you is willing to tell us what he read in that text, I will hand over to him.

## 1

O. MANNONI: *I would very much like to ask for clarification on a point which troubles me a little. It seems, when reading Freud, that he maintains there are two aspects of the compulsion to repeat. In the one, it is a matter of renewing an attempt that has failed so as to make it succeed – this takes the form of protection against danger, against trauma. In the other, it seems that one reverts to a more comfortable position, because one has failed to attain the position which, from an evolutionary perspective, is posterior. I can't see how these two positions are finally made to agree, or at least I've missed the agreement, and I'm troubled by this difficulty.*

There is, as Lefèvre-Pontalis observed, an ambiguity in the use of the word *Wiederholungszwang*. There are two registers intermingling, interweaving, a

restitutive tendency and a repetitive tendency, and between the two, I wouldn't want to say that Freud's thought vacillates, because there is no less vacillating thought than his, but one does have the feeling that his research retraces its steps. It is as if each time he goes too far in one direction, he stops to say – isn't this simply the restitutive tendency? But at each turn he remarks that that isn't enough, and that, after the restitutive tendency has manifested itself, something is left over which at the level of individual psychology appears to be gratuitous, paradoxical, enigmatic and is genuinely repetitive.

In effect, according to the hypothesis of the pleasure principle, the entire system should always return to its starting-point, should always act in a homeostatic way, as we say these days. How is it that there is something which, from whatever end we approach it, does not fit into the movement, into the framework of the pleasure principle? Each time, Freud tries to make the phenomena he's observed fit inside this framework, and experience again and again requires him to relinquish it. It is the most paradoxical facts which are the most instructive. And in the end, it is the solid fact of reproduction in the transference which forces on him the decision to admit the compulsion to repeat as such.

*O. MANNONI: My question was aimed at clarifying the point – did the compulsion to repeat in the second sense oblige him to reshape the initial conception, or are they superimposed as distinct? I haven't quite made out if that made him return to the idea that there was a pure and simple restitution, or whether, on the contrary, he added to the pure and simple restitution, a compulsion now . . .*

That is precisely why he was led straight to the function of the death instinct. There, he tips over the limit of the blueprint.

*M. HYPPOLITE: Why does he call it death instinct? One gets the impression of something terribly enigmatic, one gets the impression that he cites heterogeneous phenomena which, quite simply, do not fit into the framework of the blueprint. What relation is there between the word death instinct and the phenomena beyond the pleasure principle? Why call it death instinct? This all of a sudden opens up perspectives some of which seem quite strange, such as the return to matter.*

*O. MANNONI: He would have been better off calling it anti-instinct.*

*M. HYPPOLITE: Once he calls it death-instinct, that leads him all of a sudden to discover other phenomena, to open up perspectives which had not been implied by what pushed him into baptising it death-instinct.*

That's right.

*M. HYPPOLITE: It is an extraordinary enigma, the return to matter, and a bit vague in my opinion. One has the impression that one is in the presence of a series of enigmas,*

*and the very name he gives them, death instinct, is itself a leap in relation to the phenomena accounted for, an enormous leap.*

M. BEJARANO: *I have the same difficulty in understanding that leap. He seems to be saying that the life-preserving instincts lead to death, he says in effect that death is sought out by the preservative instincts. This seems to me to be as specious as saying, by transposition, that fire, that is to say heat, is cold. I can't understand why he calls that death instinct.*

M. HYPPOLITE: *Isn't it a somewhat woolly philosophy? He ends up by saying that the libido leads to the formation of groups which are more and more bound to one another, and organic, whereas the death instinct leads to a return to the elements.*

That doesn't give one the feeling of being vague. One gets the impression, reading the text, that Freud is following what I call his little hunch.<sup>1</sup> There's something at work in him. And at the end, he himself admits the extremely speculative nature of the whole of his argumentation, or more precisely of his circular interrogation. He constantly returns to his starting points, and completes another circle, and again rediscovers the passage, and finally ends up making a leap, and having made the leap, admits that there is something there which does indeed move completely off the edges of the blueprint, and can in no way be grounded solely in a reference to experience. He asserts finally that if this articulation has seemed to him to be worth communicating, it is because he was of necessity brought down the path of this problematic.

M. HYPPOLITE: *One gets the impression that, according to him, the two instincts, of life and of death, are but one in the unconscious, but what is worrisome is when the components are separated. There is something very beautiful, very striking, mixed up, in all this, just like a child who kisses you by scratching you – in fact he says it explicitly. It is true, there is in what we call human love a share of aggressivity, without which there would only be impotence, but which can go so far as killing the partner, and a share of libido, which would end in actual impotence if there weren't a share of aggressivity. If they work together, it makes for human love. But when they come apart, when one of the components functions alone, then the death instinct appears.*

That is at the level of what we might call the immediate, to be found in the psychological experience of the individual, we might say, taking it a long way, so as to give an image to our thinking, at the level of the puppet. But Freud is interested in knowing what pulls the strings on the puppet. That is what he is talking about when he talks of death instinct or life instinct.

Which brings me back to the question which I thought I had to ask you following yesterday evening's discussion – *is psychoanalysis a humanism?* It's

<sup>1</sup> 'sa petite idée'.

the same question as when I ask whether the autonomous<sup>2</sup> *ego* is in the spirit of the Freudian discovery. The question of knowing what is man's portion of autonomy is age-old and everyone's concern. What does Freud contribute to the topic? Is it a revolution or no? And by the same token there arises the third question I raised yesterday evening – what is there that's new, if we place them on the same register, in moving from Hegel to Freud?

M. HYPOLITE: *A lot is.*

I certainly won't give you an exhaustive reply today, because we have some ground to cover, perhaps a long way to go. To start with I will simply try in my own way to locate the meaning of what just a moment ago I called Freud's little, or big, hunch, when there he is vacillating, wheeling around the function of the death instinct.

It is very surprising that laboratory scientists should still entertain this mirage, that it is the individual, the human subject – and why him amongst all the others? – who is truly autonomous, and that, somewhere in him, be it in the pineal gland or elsewhere, there's a signalman, the little man within a man, who makes the apparatus tick. That is exactly what the whole of analytic thought, with few exceptions, has returned to, for the moment.

People tell us about the autonomous *ego*, about the sane part of the ego, about the ego which must be strengthened, about the ego which isn't sufficiently strong to support us in doing an analysis, about the ego which should be the ally of the analyst, the ally of the analyst's ego, etc. You see these two *egos*, arm in arm, the analyst's ego and that of the subject, in fact subordinated to the other in this so-called alliance. Nothing in experience gives us the faintest hint of it, since precisely the contrary takes place – it is at the level of the ego that all the resistances occur. One really does wonder where they could start if not from this ego.

I don't have the time today to extract a few texts from my papers, but I will some day, and then I will cite recently published paragraphs, in which the idea is complacently set down, set down with the satisfaction of well-earned repose, that it is very simple, as simple as saying 'hallo', that there are some good things in this decent little subject, that there is a conflict-free sphere in which the libido is neutralised, delibidinised, in which aggressivity itself is deaggressivised. It's like Archimedes – you give him his little point outside of the world, and he can move it. But this little point outside the world doesn't exist.'

One must have a clear sense of the scope of the question. Its scope is as broad as this – is psychoanalysis a humanism? – which puts into question one of the fundamental premises of classical thought, from a certain period in Greek history on. We are told that man is the measure of all things. But where is his own measure? Is it to be found in himself?

<sup>2</sup> English in the original.

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M. HYPPOLITE: *Don't you think – this is almost an answer to your question, which I was led to reflect upon for some of the night, but which does chime in with what you are saying – that in Freud there is a deep conflict between a rationalist – by rationalist I mean someone who thinks that it is possible to render humanity rational, and this happens by way of the ego – and an entirely different man, absolutely detached from the curing of men, eager for a knowledge of an entirely different depth, who at every moment is opposed to this rationalist? In The Future of an Illusion Freud wonders what will happen when all illusions are gone. And there the ego, the reinforced ego, the human, acting, ego intervenes. One sees humanity freed. But in Freud there is a more profound aspect. Isn't the discovery of the death instinct tied to that deeper aspect which the rationalist does not express? There are two men in Freud. From time to time, I see the rationalist, and that is the humanist side – we will rid ourselves of all illusions, what will be left? Then there is the pure speculator, who is revealed on the side of the death instinct.*

That is the adventure of Freud as creator. I don't at all think that, for him, there was a conflict there. One could maintain this if he had embodied the rationalist aspiration in a dream of rationalisation. However, as far as he was able to go, in *The Future of an Illusion* for instance, or in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, his dialogue with Einsteinian utopism, that of Einstein when he leaves his mathematical genius behind to find himself in the midst of platitudes . . .

M. HYPPOLITE: *Freud's materialism has a certain grandeur.*

Platitudes also have their grandeur. I don't think that was Freud's level.

M. HYPPOLITE: *That is why I like him, because that wasn't his level. His is something far more enigmatic.*

In *Civilisation and its Discontents*, he knows how to see where it resists. No matter how far one extends, I won't say rationalism, but rationalisation, it will necessarily blow up somewhere.

M. HYPPOLITE: *That is what is most profound in Freud. But there's also the rationalist in him.*

His thought deserves to be qualified, at the highest level, and in the firmest manner, as rationalist, in the full sense of the word, and from one end to the other. This text, so difficult to penetrate, around which we have been turning, makes present the most lively, the most pressing demands of a reason which never abdicates, which does not say – *Here begins the opaque and the ineffable*. He enters, and even at the risk of appearing lost in obscurity, he continues with reason. I don't believe there is any abdication on his part, nor any final prostration, nor that he ever renounces working with reason, nor that he retires to the mountains, thinking that everything is just fine as it is.

M. HYPPOLITE: *To be sure, he goes right up to the light, even if this light, the most complete, must be antithetical. By rationalism, I didn't mean to say that he was engaging in a new religion. On the contrary, the Ausführung is a religion against religion.*

Its antithesis – let us call it that – is precisely the death instinct. It is a decisive step in the grasp of reality, a reality which surpasses by far what we designate as such in the reality principle. The death instinct isn't an admission of impotence, it isn't a coming to a halt before an irreducible, an ineffable last thing, it is a concept. We will now try our best to take some steps in its direction.

## 2

I will begin, since this where we've got to, with what you suggested yesterday evening about *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The way you see it, it is clear that it concerns the progress of knowledge. *Bewusstsein* in Hegel is far closer to knowledge than to consciousness. However, if yesterday's assembly hadn't been so well-behaved, one of the questions which I would have asked would have been – what is the function of non-knowledge in Hegel? You should give us a second talk about that next term. Freud wrote a number of articles on the subject of knowing what one should really expect from the reconquest of this psychological Zuider Zee which is the unconscious.<sup>3</sup> When we will have drained the polders of the id, what will it bring in the way of human returns? Well, this perspective didn't seem particularly exalting. It seemed to him that one risked bursting some dikes. All that is in Freud, and I only mention it to show that we are still continuing the commentary on Freud's thought. Within the Hegelian perspective, what is the realisation, the end of history? I think that, to put it succinctly, the entire forward march of the phenomenology of spirit is all of you – that's what you are here for. That's what what you are doing means, even when you don't think about it. Always the puppet strings. Will M. Hyppolite give me his approval if I say that the whole of the forward march of this phenomenology of spirit is an ever more elaborated mastery?

M. HYPPOLITE: *That depends on what you are going to put under mastery.*

Quite. I am going to try to illustrate it, without rounding off the corners. I don't mean to ease my term in, but on the contrary to show in which way it can cut.

M. HYPPOLITE: *Don't take me as your adversary. I'm not Hegelian. I'm probably against. Don't take me as representing Hegel.*

That is going to simplify matters greatly for us. I'm only asking you, because

<sup>3</sup> A reference to the last two sentences of Lecture XXXI of the *New Introductory Lectures*, GW XV 86; Stud I 516; SE XXII 80.

you are still more of a Hegel specialist than I, to tell me whether I'm not going too far, that is to say whether major texts might contradict me.

As I have often pointed out, I don't much like hearing that we have *gone beyond* Hegel, the way one hears we have *gone beyond* Descartes. We go beyond everything and always end up in the same place. Hence, an ever more elaborate mastery. Let us illustrate it.

The end of history, that's absolute knowledge. You can't get out of that – if consciousness is knowledge, written as such in Hegel.

M. HYPPOLITE: Yes, but Hegel can be interpreted. One can ask whether there is a moment, in the wake of experience, which appears as absolute knowledge or whether absolute knowledge is in the whole presentation of experience? That is to say – are we always and at every moment in absolute knowledge? Is there, in the Phenomenology, a series of stages which are prior to absolute knowledge, then a final stage which Napoleon, anyone, etc., reaches, and which one would call absolute knowledge? Hegel says so somewhat, but he can be understood in an entirely different fashion. Heidegger's interpretation, for instance, is tendentious, but fortunately it is tenable. That is why one doesn't go beyond Hegel. It may be highly likely that absolute knowledge be, so to speak, immanent at every state of the Phenomenology. Only consciousness misses it. Consciousness makes of this truth which absolute knowledge would be another natural phenomenon, which is not absolute knowledge. Absolute knowledge therefore would never be a moment in history, and it would always be. Absolute knowledge would be experience as such, and not a moment in experience. Consciousness being in the field, doesn't see the field. Seeing the field, that's it, absolute knowledge.

Still, in Hegel this absolute knowledge is embodied in a discourse.

M. HYPPOLITE: Certainly.

I think that according to Hegel, everything is always there, all of history is always actually present, vertically so. Otherwise, it would be a childish tale. And the thing with absolute knowledge, which indeed is here, ever since the first Neanderthal idiots, is that discourse closes in on itself, whether or not it is in complete disagreement with itself, whether or not everything which can be expressed in the discourse is coherent and justified.

That is where I am stopping you. We are going step by step, but it is better to go slowly in order to go assuredly. This will bring us to what we are looking for – to the meaning, to the originality of what Freud contributes in relation to Hegel.

Within the Hegelian perspective, completed discourse – doubtless, from the moment discourse has reached its completion, there won't be any further need to speak, that is what we call the post-revolutionary stages, let's leave that to one side – completed discourse, the embodiment of absolute knowledge, is the instrument of power, the sceptre and the property of those who know. Nothing

implies that everyone partakes in it. When the scientists I mentioned yesterday evening – this is more than a myth, it is the very meaning of the forward march of the symbol – succeed in bringing human discourse to a close, they are in possession of it, and those who don't have it have nothing left but to turn to jazz, to dance, to entertain themselves, the good fellows, the nice guys, the libidinal types. That is what I call elaborated mastery.

Within absolute knowledge, there remains one last division, one last separation, ontological if I may say, within man. If Hegel has gone beyond a certain religious individualism which grounds the existence of the individual in his unique tête-à-tête with God, it is by showing that the reality, so to speak, of each human being is in the being of the other. In the end, there is a reciprocal alienation, as you so well explained it yesterday evening, and, I want to insist on this, it is irreducible, with no way out. What could be more stupid than the primitive master? A real master. We have as a matter of fact all lived long enough to realise what actually happens when the aspiration to mastery gets a hold on men! We saw it during the war, the political error of those whose ideology it was to believe themselves the masters, to believe that all it takes is to stretch out the hand to take. The Germans advance towards Toulon to catch the fleet there – a true story of masters. The mastery is entirely on the slave's side, because he elaborates his mastery against the master. Now, this reciprocal alienation, it must last until the end. Think how little effect the elaborated discourse will have on those who are busy with jazz at the corner *café*. And how much the masters will be aching to go and join them. While conversely the others will consider themselves wretches, nobodies, and will think – *how happy the master is in enjoying being master?* – whereas, of course, he will be completely frustrated. That is where, I think, in the last instance, Hegel leads us to.

Hegel is at the limit of anthropology. Freud got out of it. His discovery is that man isn't entirely in man. Freud isn't a humanist. I will try and explain to you why.

### 3

Let us turn to basics. Freud was a physician, but he was born about a century later than Hegel, and a lot of things happened in the meantime, which were not lacking in consequences for the meaning which might be given to the word 'physician'. Freud wasn't a physician as Aesculapius, Hippocrates or Saint Luke were. He was a physician in the way we all more or less are. In short, he was a physician who no longer is one, as we ourselves are of a type of physician which no longer partakes in the tradition of what the physician has always been for man.

It is very odd to say, there's a truly strange incoherence in saying – man *has* a body. For us it makes sense, it is even probable that it has always made sense,

but it makes more sense for us than for anybody else, since, with Hegel and without knowing it, in so far as everybody is Hegelian without knowing it, we have pushed to an extreme degree the identification of man with his knowledge, which is an accumulated knowledge. It is very strange to be localised in a body, and this strangeness can't be minimised, despite the fact that a great deal of time is spent puffing ourselves up and boasting about having reinvented human unity, which that idiot Descartes had cut in two. It is completely useless to make great declarations about returning to the unity of the human being, to the soul as the body's form, with large dosages of Thomism and Aristotelianism. The division is here to stay. And that is why physicians of our day and age aren't the physicians of other times, except those who spend their time convinced that there are temperaments, constitutions, and other things of that sort. The physician has with respect to the body the attitude of the man who dismantles a machine. All statements of principles notwithstanding, this attitude is a radical one. That's the point where Freud started, and that was his ideal – to do pathological anatomy, anatomical physiology, to discover what this little complicated apparatus embodied there in the nervous system is for.

This perspective, which splits the unity of the living, certainly does have something of a disturbing, scandalous aspect, and one entire line of thought tries to counter it – I'm thinking of gestaltism and other well intentioned theoretical elaborations, which hope to return to the benevolence of nature and to a pre-established harmony. Of course, nothing proves that the body is a machine, and in fact there's every chance that it isn't. But that isn't the problem. The important thing is that this is the way in which one has tackled the question. I named him just now, the *one* in question, it's Descartes. He wasn't the only one, for it took quite a bit for him to begin to think of the body as a machine. What in particular it took was for there to be one which not only worked by itself, but which could embody in a quite striking way something essentially human.

Admittedly, while this was taking place, nobody actually realised it. But now we have a tiny bit of hindsight. The phenomenon occurs sometime before Hegel. Hegel, who only played a small part in all this, is perhaps the last representative of a certain classical anthropology, but in the end, he is almost, with respect to Descartes, a bit behind.

The machine I'm talking about is the clock. It is rare in our day and age for a man to be sufficiently wonderstruck by a clock. Louis Aragon talks about this in *Le Paysan de Paris* in words which only a poet could find to salute the miraculous character of a thing, this thing, which, he says, pursues a human hypothesis, whether man be there or not.

So there were clocks. They weren't very miraculous yet, since it was a long time after the *Discourse on Method* before there was a real one, a good one, with a

pendulum, Huygens's clock – I have already referred to it in one of my texts. There were already some worked by weights, which, year in year out, nonetheless embodied the measure of time. It was obviously necessary for us to cover a certain distance in history before we realised to what extent it is essential to our *being-there*, as they say, to know the time. A lot can be said about this time not being the real one, it still passes there, in the clock, all alone like an adult.

I can't recommend too strongly to you the reading of a book by Descartes called *Of Man*. You will be able to get hold of this *Man* on the cheap, it isn't one of the most sought-after-works, it will cost you less than the *Discourse on Method*, dear to the dentists. Flip through it, and confirm that what Descartes is looking for in man is the clock.

This machine isn't what a vain people think it is. It isn't purely and simply the opposite of the living, the simulacrum of the living. That it was constructed so as to embody something which is called time and is the mystery of mysteries, should put us on the right track. What is in play in the machine? That at the same time someone called Pascal busied himself constructing a machine, still very modest, making additions, shows us that the machine is tied to radically human functions. It isn't a simple artifact, as could be said of chairs, tables, and of other more or less symbolic objects, among which we live without realising that they make for our own portrait. Machines are something else. They go much further in the direction of what we are in reality, further even than the people who build them suspect.

Hegel thought himself to be something like the embodiment of the Spirit of his time, and he dreamt that Napoleon was the *Weltseele*, the soul of the world, the other pole, more feminine, more carnal, of power. Well, both of them distinguished themselves by the fact that they completely failed to apprehend [*méconnu*] the importance of this phenomenon, which was beginning to come into view in their time – the steam engine. Yet Watt wasn't that long in coming, and there were already things which worked all by themselves, little bombs down the mines.

The machine embodies the most radical symbolic activity of man, and it was necessary so that questions could be raised – you may not notice it in the middle of all this – at the level at which we are raising them.

In Freud something is talked about, which isn't talked about in Hegel, namely energy. That is the major preoccupation, the dominant preoccupation, which from the speculative point of view is more important than this purely homonymic confusion we got caught up in yesterday evening when we were talking of the opposition between consciousness in Hegel's time, and the unconscious in Freud's time – it's like talking about the contradiction between the Parthenon and hydroelectricity, they've got nothing to do with one another. Between Hegel and Freud, there's the advent of the world of the machine.

Energy, I had you observe last time, is a notion which can only emerge once there are machines. Not that energy hasn't always been there. Except that people who had slaves didn't realise that one could establish equations for the price of their food and what they did in their *latifundia*. There are no examples of energy calculations in the use of slaves. There is not the hint of an equation as to their output. Cato never did it. It took machines for us to realise they had to be fed. And more – they had to be looked after. But why? Because they tend to wear out. Slaves do as well, but one doesn't think about it, one thinks that it is natural for them to get old and croak. And later on, it dawned on people, something which was never thought of before, that living things look after themselves all on their own, in other words, they represent homeostats.

From then on, you begin to see the dawn of modern biology, with its characteristic of never calling upon any notion concerning life. Vitalist thought is alien to biology. The founding spirit of modern biology, who died prematurely, and whose statue adorns the old faculty of medicine, Bichat, expressed this in the most succinct manner. He was someone who had somehow maintained a vague belief in God, but who was extremely clear-sighted – he knew that a new period had begun, and that from now on life was going to be defined in relation to death. That converges with what I am trying to explain to you, the decisive character of the reference to the machine so far as the founding of biology is concerned. Biologists think that they devote themselves to the study of life. It's not clear why. Until further notice, their fundamental concepts' point of origin has nothing to do with the phenomenon of life, which in its essence remains completely impenetrable. The phenomenon of life continues to elude us, whatever we do, despite the reiterated reaffirmations that we are getting closer to it. Biological concepts remain completely inadequate to it, which doesn't prevent them from retaining all their value.

Some people were surprised by the approbation which I bestowed yesterday evening on Françoise, when in relation to this third term we are looking for in the inter-human dialectic, she brought in biology. She may not have been thinking about biology exactly as I'm going to describe it to you, but let us say that the truth came out of the mouth of someone who was saying it naively.

We will take biology by antiphrasis. Freudian biology has nothing to do with biology. It is a matter of manipulating symbols with the aim of resolving energy questions, as the homeostatic reference indicates, thus enabling us to characterise as such not only the human being, but the functioning of its major apparatuses. Freud's whole discussion revolves around that question, what, in terms of energy, is the psyche? This is where the originality of what in him is called biological thought resides. He wasn't a biologist, any more than any of us are, but throughout his work he placed the accent on the energy function.

If we know how to reveal the meaning of this energy myth, we see the emergence of what was, from the start and without it being understood,

implicit in the metaphor of the human body as a machine. Here we see the manifestation of a certain beyond of the inter-human reference, which is in all strictness the symbolic beyond. That is what we are going to study, and surely we will then understand this kind of dawn which the Freudian experience is.

Freud started from a conception of the nervous system according to which it always tends to return to a point of equilibrium. That is what he started with, because it was then a necessity in the mind of any physician of that scientific age concerned with the human body.

Anzieu, look at the *Entwurf*, which is what I am talking about, and give us an account of it. On this foundation, Freud tried to build a theory of the functioning of the nervous system, by showing that the brain operates as a buffer-organ between man and reality, as a homeostat organ. And he then comes up against, he stumbles on, the dream. He realises that the brain is a dream machine. And it is in the dream machine that he rediscovers what was there all along and which hadn't been noticed, namely, that it is at the most organic and most simple, most immediate and least manageable level, at the most unconscious level, that sense and speech are revealed and blossom forth in their entirety.

Hence the complete revolution in his thinking, and the move to the *Traumdeutung*. It is said that he abandons a physiologising perspective for a psychologising perspective. That's not the point. He discovers the operation of the symbol as such, the manifestation of the symbol in the dialectical state, in the semantic state, in its displacements, puns, play on words, jokes working all on their own in the dream machine. And he has to take a line on this discovery, accept it or ignore it, as all the others had to when they were that close to it. It was such a turning-point that he didn't know anything about what was happening to him. It took him another twenty years of a life which was already quite advanced at the time of this discovery, to be able to look back to his premises and to try to recover what it means in terms of energy. That is what required him to produce the new elaboration of the beyond of the pleasure principle and of the death instinct.

In this re-elaboration, one can see the meaning we needed yesterday evening, together with the reference of man to his fellow man, so as to make up that third term where, since Freud, the true axis of the realisation of the human being is to be found. That I cannot name for you as yet, given the point I've got to today.

12 January 1955

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## The circuit

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY AND UNDERSTANDING  
 - CONSERVATION, ENTROPY, INFORMATION  
 - PLEASURE PRINCIPLE AND REALITY PRINCIPLE  
 - GRIBOUILLE'S APPRENTICESHIP  
 REMINISCENCE AND REPETITION

We are going to reflect on yesterday evening's extraordinary paper.<sup>1</sup> Did you make some sense of it? The discussion was remarkably well focused, and I was very pleased with that. But do you really see the heart of the problem, and the distance which Merleau-Ponty unyieldingly keeps from the analytic experience?

### 1

There is a term towards which the discussion could have turned if we had had more time, namely Gestaltism. I don't know whether you spotted it in passing, it arose at one point in Merleau-Ponty's talk as what for him is truly the measure, the standard of the encounter with the other and with reality. And, indeed, what lies at bottom of his teaching is understanding. In spite of the distance he tries to keep from what he calls the traditional liberal position, well, as was quite rightly pointed out to him, he isn't that far from it. Because in the end, his only advance is to have realised that some things are difficult to understand, hard to swallow.

It's no accident that he has taken his point of reference from contemporary political experience. You know how greatly concerned he is about this, the breaking off of the dialogue with communism. For him it's a historical crisis spanning human experience. He realises both that we don't understand one another, and he reaffirms that we must understand. As the title of one of his recent articles in a weekly expressed it – *D'abord comprendre les Communistes*.

A very paradoxical title, since he realises precisely that, from his point of view, he can't understand.

It was just the same yesterday evening. It is unfortunate that he didn't

<sup>1</sup> On 18 January 1955, Maurice Merleau-Ponty gave a lecture to the Société Française de Psychanalyse, entitled 'Philosophy and psychoanalysis'.

examine more closely, no doubt because of insufficient familiarity with this area, whether understanding has a place in the field of analysis. In other words, can the field of analysis accede to homogeneity? Can everything in it be understood? That is the question which Jean Hyppolite raised – is Freudianism a humanism, yes or no? Merleau-Ponty's position is essentially a humanist one. And you can see where that leads him.

In effect, he hangs on to the notion of totality, of unitary functioning, he always presupposes a given unity accessible to what in the end will be an instantaneous, theoretical, contemplative apprehension, to which the experience of the *good form*, so very ambiguous in Gestaltism, gives a semblance of support. Not that this notion doesn't correspond to measurable facts, a wealth of experimentation. But the ambiguity lies in a theorisation in which physics becomes confused with phenomenology, in which a drop of water, so long as it takes on a spherical form, is on the same level as this something which requires that we always tend to perceive the approximate form we see as circular.

That is a correlation which to be sure makes for a striking image, but it elides the essential problem. No doubt something tends to produce this good form at the back of the retina, something in the physical world tends to produce certain analogous forms, but putting these two facts together isn't a way of giving an account of experience in all its richness. In any case, if one does so, one can no longer assert, as Merleau-Ponty would like to, the primacy of consciousness. Consciousness, in the end, itself becomes a mechanism. And it plays, without him realising it, the function which I argue here to be the first stage [*temps*] of the dialectic of the ego. Except, for Merleau-Ponty, it's all there, in consciousness. A contemplative consciousness constitutes the world through a series of syntheses, of exchanges, which at every moment place it within a renewed, more enveloping totality, but which always finds its origin in the subject. (*To M. Hyppolite*) Don't you agree?

**M. HYPPOLITE:** *I'm listening to the movement you're unfolding starting off from the Gestalt. In the end, it is a phenomenology of the imaginary, in the sense in which we use this word.*

**O. MANNONI:** *It can nonetheless go beyond the imaginary level. I see the seed of Gestaltist thinking in Darwin's thinking. When he replaces variation with mutation, he discovers a nature which yields good forms. But the existence of forms which aren't simply mechanical then raises a problem. It seems to me that the Gestalt is an attempt to resolve it.*

Of course. What you just said is one more step, which I don't take, because I don't want to go beyond the level Merleau-Ponty keeps to. But in fact, in following him, in taking the word *form* in its fullest possible acceptation, one would be led back to a vitalism, to the mysteries of the creative force.

The idea of living evolution, the notion that nature always produces superior forms, more and more elaborated, more and more integrated, better and better built organisms, the belief that progress of some sort is immanent in the movement of life, all this is alien to him, and he explicitly repudiates it. Since Freud is a subject little inclined to make his decisions from positions of principle, I think that it is his experience of man which guides him. It is a medical experience. It allowed him to locate the register of a certain kind of suffering and illness, of fundamental conflict, in man.

To explain the world with a natural tendency to create superior forms is quite the opposite of the essential conflict such as he sees it played out in the human being. But this conflict goes beyond the human being. It's as if Freud were hurled into *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which is an incontestably metaphysical category, he steps outside of the limits of the domain of the human in the organic sense of the word. Is it a conception of the world? No, it is a category of thought, to which every experience of the concrete subject cannot but refer itself.

M. HYPPOLITE: *I'm not at all challenging the crisis described by Freud. But he opposes the libido to the death instinct, and he defines it as the tendency of the organism to come together with other organisms, as if that constituted progress, integration. So, independently of this undeniable conflict of which you speak and which doesn't make him an optimist from the human point of view, we nevertheless find in him a conception of the libido, what is more ill defined, which asserts clearly the broader and broader integration of organisms. Freud says it quite succinctly in the text itself.*

I understand that. But note that the tendency to union – Eros tends to unite – is only ever apprehended in its relation to the contrary tendency, which leads to division, to rupture, to a redispersion, most especially of inanimate matter. These two tendencies are strictly inseparable. No notion is less unitary than that. Let us go over it step by step.

## 2

What impasse had we reached last time? The organism already conceived by Freud as a machine, has a tendency to return to its state of equilibrium – this is what the pleasure principle states. Now, at first sight, this restitutive tendency is not clearly distinguishable, in Freud's text, from the repetitive tendency which he isolates, and which constitutes his original contribution. So we ask ourselves the following question – what distinguishes these two tendencies?

In this text, the middle terms are very strange, because they are part of a circular dialectic. Freud is constantly returning to a notion which always

seems to elude him. It resists, but he doesn't stop, he tries to maintain the originality of the repetitive tendency at all costs. Without the shadow of a doubt, there was something he lacked, of the order of categories or of images, so as to give us a clear sense of it.

From the beginning of Freud's work to the end, the pleasure principle is explained in the following way – when faced with a stimulus encroaching on the living apparatus, the nervous system is as it were the indispensable delegate of the homeostat, of the indispensable regulator, thanks to which the living being survives, and to which corresponds a tendency to lower the excitation to a minimum. *To a minimum*, what does that mean? There is an ambiguity here, which puts analytic authors under some difficulty. Read them, you'll see them slide down the slope which Freud's way of rendering the question dialectical opens to them.

Freud here offered them the opportunity for yet one more misunderstanding, and in chorus they all succumb to it, in their panic.

The minimum tension can mean one of two things, all biologists will agree, according to whether it is a matter of the minimum given a certain definition of the equilibrium of the system, or of the minimum purely and simply, that is to say, with respect to the living being, death.

Indeed one can consider that with death, all tensions are reduced, from the point of view of the living being, to zero. But one can just as well take into consideration the processes of decomposition which follow death. One then ends up defining the aim of the pleasure principle as the concrete dissolution of the corpse. That is something which one cannot but see as excessive.

However, I can cite you several authors for whom reducing the stimuli to the minimum means nothing more nor less than the death of the living being. That is to assume that the problem has been resolved, that is to confuse the pleasure principle with what we think Freud designated under the name of the death instinct. I say *what we think*, because, when Freud speaks of the death instinct, he is, thank God, designating something less absurd, less anti-biological, anti-scientific.

There is something which is distinct from the pleasure principle and which tends to reduce all animate things to the inanimate – that is how Freud puts it. What does he mean by this? What obliges him to think that? Not the death of living beings. It's human experience, human interchanges, intersubjectivity. Something of what he observes in man constrains him to step out of the limits of life.

No doubt there is a principle which brings the libido back to death, but it doesn't bring it back any old how. If it brought it back there by the shortest paths, the problem would be resolved. But it brings it back there only along the paths of life, it so happens.

The principle which brings the living being back to death is situated, is

marked out behind the necessity it experiences to take the roads of life – and it can only take that way. It cannot find death along any old road.

In other words, the machine looks after itself, maps out a certain curve, a certain persistence. And it is along the very path of this subsistence that something else becomes manifest, sustained by this existence it finds there and which shows it its passage.

There is an essential link which must be made right away – when you draw a rabbit out of a hat, it's because you put it there in the first place. Physicists have a name for this formulation, they call it the first law of thermodynamics, the law of the conservation of energy – if there's something at the end, just as much had to be there at the beginning.

The second principle – I'll try to give you a striking image of it – stipulates that the manifestation of this energy has undegraded modes and others which aren't. To put it another way, you can't swim against the current. When you do a job, a part of it is expended, as heat for instance – there's a loss. That's called entropy.

There is no mystery to entropy, it's a symbol, a thing you can write on the blackboard, and you'd be very wrong to think it exists. Entropy is a capital *E*, absolutely indispensable to our thinking. And even if you couldn't care less about this capital *E*, because a man called Karlus Mayer, a doctor in the navy, founded it, it is the principle, actually, of everything – one cannot avoid taking it into account when one runs a factory, atomic or otherwise, or a country. Karlus Mayer started thinking seriously about it while bleeding his patients – sometimes the paths of thought are mysterious, those of the Lord are unfathomable. It is quite striking that having thought this one out, and this is, to be sure, one of thought's great moments, he was extremely enfeebled by it – as if giving birth to capital *E* might have left its mark on the nervous system.

You'd be wrong to think that, when I take up positions which are commonly thought of as anti-organicist, it is because – as someone I like a lot said one day – the nervous system annoys me. I don't take such sentimental reasons as my guide. I think ordinary organicism is a stupidity, but there is another variety which doesn't in any way neglect material phenomena. Which leads me to tell you – in all honesty, if not in complete truth, for truth would require looking for its traces in experience – that I think that, for an unhappy individual to have been charged by I know not what, *the holy language* as Valéry put it, with the task of bringing capital *E* to life, doesn't perhaps come about without cost. Karlus Mayer certainly had two parts to his life, the one before and the one after, when nothing else happened – he had said what he had to say.

Well, this entropy, Freud encounters it, and he already does so by the end of the *Wolfman*. He has a firm sense that it has some kind of relation to his death instinct but without being able, there either, to be quite at ease with it, and throughout this article he pursues his infernal little merry-go-round, like

Diogenes seeking a man with his lantern. He was missing something. It would be too easy if I were to tell you – I will tell you – that all you have to do is add a capital *F* or a capital *I* to the capital *E*. That is certainly not it, because it hasn't thereby been entirely elucidated.

Contemporary thought is in the process of trying to get ahold of this down paths which are often ambiguous, even confusional, and you can't be unaware that you are present at its birth. I would go even further – in so far as you are here, following my seminar, you are in the process of see-sawing into this childbirth. You are entering into that dimension in which thought tries to order itself and find its correct symbol, its capital *F* following on from capital *E*. In the present state of things, it's the quantity of information.

Some aren't taken aback by this. Others seem completely baffled.

The great adventure of the research concerning communication began at some distance, at least ostensibly, from our concerns. Rather let's say, for how are we to know where it all began, that one of its significant moments is to be found in the company of telephone engineers.

The Bell Telephone Company needed to economise, that is to say, to pass the greatest possible number of communications down one single wire. In a country as vast as the United States, it is very important to save on a few wires, and to get the inanities which generally travel by this kind of transmission apparatus to pass down the smallest possible number of wires. That is where the quantification of communication started. So a start was made, as you can see, by dealing with something very far removed from what we here call speech. It had nothing to do with knowing whether what people tell each other makes any sense. Besides, what is said on the telephone, you must know from experience, never does. But one communicates, one recognises the modulation of a human voice, and as a result one has that appearance of understanding which comes with the fact that one recognises words one already knows. It is a matter of knowing what are the most economical conditions which enable one to transmit the words people recognise. No one cares about the meaning. Doesn't this underline rather well the point which I am emphasising, which one always forgets, namely that language, this language which is the instrument of speech, is something material?

In this way it was realised that there was no need for everything that gets inscribed on to the small sheet of an apparatus which has been more or less perfected, and become electronic in the meantime, but which in the end is still a Marey's apparatus,<sup>2</sup> which oscillates and represents the modulation of the voice. To obtain the same result all that is needed is to take a small slice from it, reducing the whole oscillation by a great deal – of the order of 1 to 10. And not

<sup>2</sup> English in the original.

only does one hear, but one recognises the voice of the dearly beloved or of dear Mrs So-and-so, at the other end. The things of the heart, the conviction passed on from one individual to another, comes over in its entirety.

The quantity of information then began to be codified. This doesn't mean that fundamental things happen between human beings. It concerns what goes down the wires, and what can be measured. Except, one then begins to wonder whether it does go, or whether it doesn't, when it deteriorates, when it is no longer communication. This what is called, in psychology, the jam,<sup>2</sup> an American word. It is the first time that confusion as such – this tendency there is in communication to cease being a communication, that is to say, of no longer communicating anything at all – appears as a fundamental concept. That makes for one more symbol.

You must get acquainted with this symbolic system, if you want to gain entrance to entire orders of reality which very much concern us. If you don't know how to manipulate these capital E's and these capital F's correctly, you can't be qualified to speak about inter-human relations. And this is in fact an objection which we could well have made yesterday evening to Merleau-Ponty. At some point in the symbolic system's development, not everyone can speak with everyone else. When we talked of closed subjectivity to him, he said – *If you can't talk with communists, the foundation of language vanishes, for the foundation of language is that it is universal.* Well of course. But one still has to be introduced into the circuit of language, and know what one is talking about when one talks about communication. And you'll see that this is essential in relation to the death instinct, which seems the opposite.

Mathematicians qualified to handle these symbols locate information as that which moves in the opposite direction to entropy. When people had become acquainted with thermodynamics, and asked themselves how their machine was going to pay for itself, they left themselves out. They regarded the machine as the master regards the slave – the machine is there, somewhere else, and it works. They were forgetting only one thing, that it was they who had signed the order form. Now, this fact turns out to have a considerable importance in the domain of energy. Because if information is introduced into the circuit of the degradation of energy, it can perform miracles. If Maxwell's demon can stop the atoms which move too slowly, and keep only those which have a tendency to be a little on the frantic side, he will cause the general level of the energy to rise again, and will do, using what would have degraded into heat, work equivalent to that which was lost.

This seems far removed from our subject. You will see how we will meet up with it again. Let us start again with our pleasure principle, and let's plunge back into the ambiguities.

## 3

At the level of the nervous system, when there are stimuli, everything works, everything comes into action, the efferents, the afferents, so that the living being returns to a state of repose. That's the pleasure principle, according to Freud.

On the intuitive level, there is, isn't there, some discordance between the pleasure principle defined thus, and what pleasure evokes in the way of raciness. Every man runs after his lady, that's what it looked like until now. In Lucretius, it was clear, and rather fun. And from time to time, analysts, despairing after all at having to use categories which seem to them so contrary to the feeling, remind us that there is indeed a pleasure in activity, a taste for stimulation. One seeks out entertainment, and one is taken in by the game. And, after all, wasn't it Freud who introduced the function of the libido into human behaviour? This libido, isn't it something rather libidinous? People seek their pleasure. So, why is this expressed theoretically by a principle which states the following – what is sought is, in the end, the cessation of pleasure. But you can see that the direction the theory takes at this point goes exactly in the opposite direction to that of subjective intuition – in the pleasure principle, pleasure, by definition, is bent on its end. The pleasure principle – the principle of pleasure – is that pleasure should cease.<sup>3</sup>

Within this perspective, what becomes of the reality principle?

The reality principle is usually introduced with the simple remark that too much pleasure-seeking ends in all kinds of accidents – you get your fingers burnt, you get the clap, you get your face smashed in. That is how we have the genesis of what is called human learning described to us. And then we are told that the pleasure principle is opposed to the reality principle. In our perspective, that obviously acquires another meaning. The reality principle consists in making the game last, that is to say, in ensuring that pleasure is renewed, so that the fight doesn't end for lack of combatants. The reality principle consists in husbanding our pleasures, these pleasures whose aim is precisely to end in cessation.

Don't get the idea that analysts are satisfied with this way of looking at the pleasure principle, which is nonetheless absolutely essential, from one end to the other, to the theory – if you don't think of the pleasure principle in this register, it is useless to introduce you to Freud.

The notion that there is a kind of pleasure proper to activity, pleasure in play, for instance, cripples the very categories of our thinking. What need would we then have of our technique? It would simply be a matter of teaching people

<sup>3</sup> 'le principe de plaisir' is equally accurately translated by 'the pleasure principle' and by 'the principle of pleasure'.

gymnastics, music or anything else you want. Pedagogical procedures belong to a completely alien register to that of analytic experience. I'm not saying that they are without value, or that they might not be made to play an essential role in the Republic – we need only refer to Plato.

One may want to fit man in to a harmonious, natural mode of functioning, one may want to get him to connect the stages of his development, allow him the free blossoming of what in his organism, reaches, in its own time, maturity, and to give to each of these stages its time for play, then its time for adaptation, time for stabilisation, until the new living feature makes its appearance. An entire anthropology can be ordered around this. But is that the anthropology that justifies psychoanalyses, that is to say, sticking them on a couch so that they can tell us a lot of bloody nonsense? What's the relation between that and gymnastics, music? Would Plato have understood what psychoanalysis was about? No, he wouldn't have understood it, despite appearances, because at this point there's an abyss, a fault, and this is what we are in the process of looking for, with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

I'm not saying that analysands are incapable of learning. You can teach people to play the piano – though it has to exist – and you notice, for instance, that having learned to play the piano with large keys, they can play on a piano with small keys, on a harpsichord, etc. But this is only a matter of determinate segments of human behaviour, and not, as in analysis, of man's destiny, his conduct when the piano lesson has ended and he goes and visits his girlfriend. Then what he learns is more or less the same as Gribouille.

You know the story of Gribouille. He goes to a funeral, and says – *Many happy returns!* He gets himself in a mess, gets his hair pulled, goes back home – *Come now, you don't say 'Many happy returns' at a funeral, you say* – *May God rest his soul!* He goes back out, comes upon a wedding – *May God rest his soul!* And he still gets into trouble.

Well that is what learning is, so analysis shows us, and that is what we come upon in the first analytic discoveries – trauma, fixation, reproduction, transference. What in the analytic experience is called the intrusion of the past into the present pertains to this order. It is always the learning of someone who will do better next time. And when I say that he will do better next time, that means that he'll have to do something completely different next time.

When we are told, employing the notion metaphorically, that analysis is an apprenticeship\* in freedom, you must admit that it has an odd ring to it. All the same, at our point in history, as Merleau-Ponty was saying yesterday, one should be on one's guard.

What does analysis uncover – if it isn't the fundamental, radical discordance

\* 'apprentissage' – translated as 'learning' up to this point; 'learning theory' (in psychology) is translated into French as 'théorie d'apprentissage'.

of forms of conduct essential to man in relation to everything which he experiences? The dimension discovered by analysis is the opposite of anything which progresses through adaptation, through approximation, through being perfected. It is something which proceeds by leaps, in jumps. It is always the strictly inadequate application of certain complete symbolic relations, and that implies several tonalities, immixtions, for instance of the imaginary in the symbolic, or inversely.

There is a radical difference between any investigation of human beings, even in the laboratory, and what happens in animals. On the animal side, one shifts within a fundamental ambiguity between instinct and learning, as soon as one tries, as is done now, to keep rather close to the facts. In animals, the so-called preformations of the instinct don't in any way exclude learning. In addition, one constantly finds in them possibilities for learning within the instinctual frameworks. What is more, one discovers that the actualisations of instinct would not occur without a call from the environment, as they say, which stimulates and provokes the crystallisation of forms, of behaviour and modes of conduct.

There is a convergence, a crystallisation, here which gives us the feeling, however sceptical we may be, of a pre-established harmony, subject to be sure to all kinds of difficulties cropping up. The notion of learning is in some way incapable of being differentiated from the maturation of instinct. It is in this domain that Gestalt categories naturally arise as indicators. An animal recognises its brother, its fellow being, its sexual partner. It finds its place in paradise, its environment, it also moulds it, it impresses itself on it. The stickleback makes a certain number of small holes, for no apparent reason, but one can tell that it is its leap which marks, its leap of which its entire body is the bearer. The animal fits into its environment. There's adaptation, and it's an adaptation which, quite precisely, has its end, its term, its limit. In this way, animal learning displays the characteristics of an organised and finite mode of becoming perfect. How different it is from what the same research – so one thinks – reveals about learning in man! These researches clearly show the function of the desire to return to it, the privilege of tasks which haven't been completed. Mrs Zeigarnik is invoked without knowing quite what she said, for saying that a task will be memorised all the better for having failed under determinate conditions. Don't you see that all of that goes totally against animal psychology, and even totally against the account we might give of memory as being the stacking up of engrams, of impressions, in which the individual being is formed? In man, it is the wrong form which prevails. In so far as a task is not completed the subject returns to it. The more abject the failure, the better the subject remembers it.

In all this, we are not considering things at the level of the being and of destiny – the thing was measured within the limitations of a laboratory. But it is not enough to measure, one must also try to understand.

I am perfectly well aware that the mind is always abundant in modes of understanding. I often say that to people I supervise – be very careful not to understand the patient, there is no surer way of getting lost. The patient says something which one can make neither head nor tail of, and, in repeating it to me – *Well, I understand him, I'm told, to mean this.* That is, in the name of intelligence, what should stop us in our tracks, what isn't comprehensible, is simply dodged.

The Zeigarnik effect, the abject failure, or the task left incomplete, everyone understands that. We all remember Mozart – he gulped down the cup of chocolate, and he came back to strike the last chord. But one fails to understand that it isn't an explanation. Or if it is one, that means we aren't animals. We aren't musicians the way my little dog is, going all dreamy when I put on certain records. A musician is always the musician of his own music. And except for people who write their own music, that is, who keep their distance from this music, there aren't many people who come back to strike their last chord.

I would like to get you to understand at what level the need for repetition is situated. And once again, we will find our reference some way away.

#### 4

Kierkegaard, who was, as you know, a humorist, discussed the difference between the pagan world and the world of grace, which Christianity introduces. Something of the ability to recognise his natural object, so apparent in animals, is present in man. There is being captured by form, being seized by play, being gripped by the mirage of life. That is what a theoretical, or theorial, or contemplative, or Platonic thought refers itself to, and it isn't an accident that Plato places reminiscence at the centre of his entire theory of knowledge. The natural object, the harmonic correspondent of the living being, is recognisable because its outline has already been sketched. And for it to have been sketched, it must already have been within the object which is going to join itself to it. That is the relation of the dyad. Plato's entire theory of knowledge – Jean Hyppolite won't contradict me – is dyadic.

But for certain specific reasons, a change occurred. Sin is from then on present as the third term, and it is no longer by following the path of reminiscence, but rather in following that of repetition, that man finds his way. That is precisely what puts Kierkegaard on the track of our Freudian intuitions, in a small book called *Repetition*. I recommend reading it to those who are already somewhat ahead. Those who don't have much time should at least read the first part.

Kierkegaard wants to avoid precisely those problems which stem from his accession to a new order, and he encounters the dam of his own reminiscences, of who he thinks he is and of what he knows he will never be able to become. He

then tries the experiment of repetition. He returns to Berlin where, during his previous stay he had experienced infinite pleasure, and he retraces his own steps. You will see what happens to him, seeking his well-being in the shadow of his pleasure. The experiment fails totally. But as a result of that, he puts us on the track of our problem, namely, how and why everything which pertains to an advance essential to the human being must take the path of a tenacious repetition.

I'm getting close to the model which I want to leave with you today, so you can see the meaning of man's need for repetition. It's all to do with the intrusion of the symbolic register. Only, I'll illustrate it for you.

Models are very important. Not that they mean anything – they mean nothing. But that's the way we are – that's our animal weakness – we need images. And, sometimes, for lack of images, some symbols don't see the light of day. In general, it is rather the symbolic deficiency which is worrisome. The image comes to us from an essentially symbolic creation, that is to say from a machine, that most modern of machines, far more dangerous for man than the atom bomb, the adding machine.

You've been told, you've understood, and you don't believe it – the adding machine has a memory. You quite like saying it, but you don't believe it. Do get it right! The sort of memory it has is destined to put all the images of memory which up to now we had given ourselves into question. The best thing we've found for giving an image of the phenomenon of memory is the Babylonian wax seal, a thing with a few little reliefs and some lines which you roll out on to a wax plaque, what we call an engram. The seal is also a machine, only no one notices that.

For machines to remember every question, questions which have already been put to them, which is sometimes necessary, something a bit more cunning was discovered – the machine's first experience circulates inside it in the form of a message.

Suppose that I send a telegram from here to Le Mans, with the request that Le Mans send it back to Tours, from there to Sens, from there to Fontainebleau, and from there to Paris, and so on indefinitely. What's needed is that when I reach the tail of my message, the head should not yet have arrived back. The message must have time to turn around. It turns quickly, it doesn't stop turning, it turns around in circles.

It's funny, this thing turning back on itself. It's called feedback,<sup>5</sup> and it's related to the homeostat. You know that that is how the admission of steam into a steam-engine is controlled. If it heats up too quickly, a governor registers it, two things are forced apart by the centrifugal force, and the admission of steam is regulated. We have oscillation about a point of equilibrium.

<sup>5</sup> English in the original.

Here, it's more complicated. We call that a message. It's very ambiguous. What is a message inside a machine? Something which proceeds by opening and not opening, the way an electronic lamp does, by yes or no. It's something articulated, of the same order as the fundamental oppositions of the symbolic register. At any given moment, this something which turns has to, or doesn't, come back into play. It is always ready to give a reply, and be completed by this selfsame act of replying, that is to say by ceasing to function as an isolated and closed circuit, by entering into the general run of things. Now this comes very close to what we can conceive of as *Zwang*, the compulsion to repeat.

As soon as we have this little model, we realise that in the very anatomy of the cerebral apparatus there are things which return back on themselves. Thanks to Riguet, on whose recommendation I read the work of an English neurologist, I became very interested in a certain octopus. It seems that its nervous system is sufficiently simple to have an isolated nerve which governs what is called the jet, or the propulsion of liquid, thanks to which the octopus has this delightful way of moving. You can also think of its memory apparatus being pretty much reduced to this message circulating between Paris and Paris, on tiny points of the nervous system.

Think back on what we said in preceding years about those striking coincidences Freud noted in the sphere of what he calls telepathy. Very important things, in the way of transference, occur in parallel in two patients, whether one is in analysis and the other just on its fringes, or whether both are in analysis. At that time, I showed you how it is through being links, supports, rings in the same circle of discourse, agents integrated in the same circle of discourse, that the subjects simultaneously experience such and such a symptomatic act, or discover such and such a memory.

At the point we have reached, I propose, looking ahead, that you conceive of the need for repetition, such as it concretely manifests itself in the subject, in analysis for instance, as the form of behaviour staged in the past and reproduced in the present in a way which doesn't conform much with vital adaptation.

Here we rediscover what I've already pointed out to you, namely that the unconscious is the discourse of the other. This discourse of the other is not the discourse of the abstract other, of the other in the dyad, of my correspondent, nor even of my slave, it is the discourse of the circuit in which I am integrated. I am one of its links. It is the discourse of my father for instance, in so far as my father made mistakes which I am absolutely condemned to reproduce – that's what we call the *super-ego*. I am condemned to reproduce them because I am obliged to pick up again the discourse he bequeathed to me, not simply because I am his son, but because one can't stop the chain of discourse, and it is precisely my duty to transmit it in its aberrant form to someone else. I have to put to someone else the problem of a situation of life or death in which the chances are

that it is just as likely that he will falter, in such a way that this discourse produces a small circuit in which an entire family, an entire coterie, an entire camp, an entire nation or half of the world will be caught. The circular form of a speech which is just at the limit between sense and non-sense, which is problematic.

That's what the need for repetition is, as we see it emerge beyond the pleasure principle. It vacillates beyond all the biological mechanisms of equilibration, of harmonisation and of agreement. It is only introduced by the register of language, by the function of the symbol, by the problematic of the question within the human order.

How does Freud project that in the most literal manner on to a level which ostensibly belongs to the order of biology? We will have to come back to that the next few times. Life is only caught up in the symbolic piece-meal, decomposed. The human being himself is in part outside life, he partakes of the death instinct. Only from there can he engage in the register of life.

*19 January 1955*

# THE FREUDIAN SCHEMATA OF THE PSYCHIC APPARATUS

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# VIII

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## Introduction to the *Entwurf*

ON THE LEVEL OF PSYCHOSOMATIC REACTIONS  
THE REAL IS WITHOUT FISSURE  
THE REDISCOVERY OF THE OBJECT

In a quite precise manner, Professor Lagache was looking for an empiricism yesterday evening, in a way which cannot fail to make one suspicious.<sup>1</sup> For no empiricism is possible without an advanced conceptualisation, as Freud's work clearly shows. One can only make headway in the empirical domain to the extent that the conceptualisation be taken up again at every moment and enriched. Look up the article 'Instincts and their vicissitudes'.<sup>2</sup>

*We have often heard it maintained that sciences should be built up on clear and sharply defined basic concepts. In actual fact no science, not even the most exact, begins with such definitions. The true beginning of scientific activity consists rather in describing phenomena and then in proceeding to group, classify and correlate them. Even at the stage of description it is not possible to avoid applying certain abstract ideas to the material in hand, ideas derived from somewhere or other but certainly not from the new observations alone. Such ideas – which will later become the basic concepts of the science – are still more indispensable as the material is further worked over. They must at first necessarily possess some degree of indefiniteness; there can be no question of any clear delimitation of their content. So long as they remain in this condition, we come to an understanding about their meaning by making repeated references to the material of observation from which they appear to have been derived, but upon which, in fact, they have been imposed. Thus, strictly speaking, they are in the nature of conventions – although everything depends on their not being arbitrarily chosen but determined by their having significant relations to the empirical material, relations that we seem to sense before we can clearly recognise and demonstrate them. It is only after more thorough investigation of the field of observation that we are able to formulate its basic scientific concepts with increased precision, and progressively so to modify them that they become serviceable and consistent over a wide area.*

They say Freud isn't a philosopher. I don't mind, but I don't know of any text

<sup>1</sup> On 25 January 1955, François Perrier led a discussion at the Société Française de Psychanalyse under the title 'Psychoanalysis and psycho-somatic medicine'.

<sup>2</sup> GW X 210; Stud III 81; SE XIV 117.

concerning the working up of scientific theory which is philosophically more profound.

*Then, indeed, the time may have come to confine them in definitions. The advance of knowledge, however, does not tolerate any rigidity even in definitions. Physics furnishes an excellent illustration of the way . . .*

This was written in 1915.

O. MANNONI: *After Galileo, though.*

But before Einstein. So, a continual reworking of concepts, which can shatter what we call rational frameworks.

*. . . in which even 'basic concepts' that have been established in the form of definitions are constantly being altered in their content.*

*A conventional basic concept of this kind, which at the moment is still somewhat obscure but which is indispensable to us in psychology, is that of an 'instinct', in other words: drive. Let us try to give a content to it by approaching it from different angles.*

Note that 'l'instinct' is here the invention of Mme Anne Berman.<sup>3</sup> Freud's text is only concerned with 'pulsion'.<sup>4</sup>

## 1

I don't think it was such a mistake on Perrier's part yesterday evening to have emphasized, at the end of his talk, psychosomatic problems and object relations.

The object relation has become an empty catch phrase, allowing one to avoid lots of problems. But, given the point we have reached in our discussions of the various registers in which the relations of the subject are established, the object, in the sense we can give it, is something else. For there to be an object relation, there must already be a narcissistic relation of the ego to the other. Moreover, that is the primary condition for any objectification of the external world – of naive, spontaneous objectification no less than that of scientific objectification.

Perrier wanted to distinguish between organic functions in which there's a representation of the relational element and others, which he contrasted to the first as the inside to the outside, thinking in this way to join up again with a theme constantly in the forefront in the Freudian theory of the psychic economy. I think that that intuition is a good one, but he didn't know how to express it in an adequate manner. The distinction at stake in the psychosomatic reactions of organs is one of a completely different level.

The issue is knowing which organs come into play in the narcissistic

<sup>3</sup> The French translator of many of Freud's works.

<sup>4</sup> 'Drives and their destinies' would be a more accurate translation of the paper's title. The English terms corresponding to the debate between 'instinct' and 'pulsion' are 'instinct' and 'drive'. See Editor's Note in the Introduction, SE XIV 111–12, and SE I xiv–xvi.

imaginary relation to the other whereby the ego is formed, *bildet*. The imaginary structuration of the ego forms around the specular image of the body itself, of the image of the other. Now, the relation of looking and being looked at does indeed involve an organ, the eye, to give it its name. Some very surprising things can happen here. How are we to approach them, when all aspects of psychosomatics are plunged in the greatest confusion?

(Dr Perrier arrives.)

My dear Perrier, I was in the middle of saying that you lacked a basic distinction, which would probably have shielded your account from some of Valabrega's criticisms.

You were looking for a distinction which takes account of the organs involved in the true psychosomatic process, as you tried to define it. I would like to point out in connection with that, that this process is very far from including everything you told us – if one puts an epileptic in a more settled environment, he sometimes does have fewer fits, but that has nothing to do with psychosomatics. You talked about relational organs, which have a relation to the external world. With respect to the others, you thought they were closer to the immense reserve of excitations of which Freud gives us a picture when he talks about internal instincts. Well, I don't think that's a good distinction.

What's important is that certain organs are caught up in the narcissistic relation, in so far as it structures both the relation of the ego to the other and the constitution of the world of objects. Behind narcissism, you've got auto-erotism, that is, a mass invested with libido inside the organism, whose internal relations, I would say, are as much beyond our ken as entropy is.

In passing, I should like to draw your attention to the fact that in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, the passage on libido is added later, sometime around 1920 if I remember right.<sup>5</sup> To think that the theory of the libido was developed at the same time as that of the instinctual phases is an illusion, a result of the fact that the *Three Essays* was revised several times. Freud fully developed his theory of the libido, the one which occupies the median part of his work, only after having introduced the function of narcissism – I did enough last year to show you that – and only after having realised that the latter was directly involved in the libidinal economy.

I'm coming back to my comparison with entropy so that you appreciate all its import. Among the energy equivalences we can apprehend with respect to a living organism, we can only really know about metabolism, that is, the balance sheet – what goes in and what comes out. There are quantities of energy

<sup>5</sup> (1905d) GW V 118–19; Stud V 121–2; SE VII 217–19; see note 1 on SE VII 217, and the Editorial Introduction, SE VII 126.

the organism assimilates, by various means, and there's what, taking everything into account – muscular expenditure, effort, dejections – comes out of the mechanism. To be sure, the laws of thermodynamics are respected – there is degradation of energy. But about everything which happens inside, we know absolutely nothing. For one simple reason – we have no means whatever of measuring the interaction of neighbouring parts, in the way we can in the physical world, the specificity of an organism lying in that everything which happens in one of its points has repercussions in all the others.

The libidinal economy is something which isn't equivalent, but is analogous.

The properly intra-organic investments, which in analysis we call auto-erotic, certainly play a very important role in psychosomatic phenomena. The *eroticisation* of this or that organ is the metaphor which comes up most often, through our sense of what order of phenomena is at stake in psychosomatic phenomena. And your distinction between psychosomatic neurosis and the psychosomatic phenomenon is precisely marked by this line of separation constituted by narcissism.

Obviously in the neuroses one always comes across defence mechanisms. One mustn't talk about it in a loose way, as if these were homogeneous with the defence mechanisms, with the reactions one speaks of within a certain economic conception of the illness. Those implicated here, which are enumerated by Anna Freud as originally constituting the defences of the ego, are always tied to the narcissistic relation in so far as it is strictly structured on the relation to the other, the possible identification with the other, the strict reciprocity between the ego and the other. Indeed, in any narcissistic relation, the ego is the other, and the other is me [*moi*].

The neurosis is always given its framework by the narcissistic structure. But, as such, it is beyond, on another level.

This other level isn't the level of the object relation, as you claimed, or as Pasche says, with a very unfortunate lapse in conceptual rigour – I say it all the more readily given that he is someone who, at one time, showed greater promise. If psychosomatic reactions as such suggest something, it is that they are outside the register of neurotic constructs. It isn't an object relation. It's a relation to something which always lies on the edge of our conceptual elaborations, which we are always thinking about, which we sometimes speak of, and which, strictly speaking, we can't grasp, and which is nonetheless there, don't forget it – I talk about the symbolic, about the imaginary, but there is also the real. Psychosomatic relations are at the level of the real.

DR PERRIER: *That is precisely what I tried to say.*

But you didn't say it. You cited Pasche on the object relation. If you put things at that level, you get yourself lost in the relations to the primal, maternal object,

you end up with a kind of clinical pat.<sup>6</sup> Nothing comes out of it. In contrast, reference to the term 'real' can on this occasion make its fruitfulness felt.

DR PERRIER: After citing *Pasche*, I believe I insisted on the fact that the psychosomatic patient had a direct relation to the real, the world, and not to the object, and that the therapeutic relation he established with a physician, however undifferentiated it was, reintroduced the register of narcissism to him. And it is to the extent that this buffer enabled him to come back to a more human dimension that he was cured of his psychosomatic cycle.

I'm not saying that what you said was silly. What I'm saying is that, from the point of view of terminological rigour, you wouldn't have been vulnerable to Valabrega's criticisms if you had introduced the term 'real', rather than that of 'object'.

M. VALABREGA: *The reference to narcissism is essential. Narcissism does however lead to an object relation, with the body itself.*

That's all I'm saying.

I spoke earlier on of voyeurism-exhibitionism, and of a drive whose source lies in an organ, the eye. But its object isn't the eye. Similarly, what pertains to the register of sado-masochism also has its origin in an organic set-up, the musculature, but everything points to the fact that its object, although not unrelated to this muscular structure, is something other. In contrast, when it is a matter of those investments we call auto-erotic, we can't distinguish the source from the object. We know nothing about it, but it seems that what we can conceive of is an investment in the organ itself.

You see the difference. You also see the extent to which auto-eroticism remains mysterious, almost impenetrable. This doesn't mean that we won't make some progress later on. If Perrier doesn't mind, after the effort he made, not slipping immediately into the reaction of sleepiness and repose, which is what the pleasure principle naturally longs for, but sustaining that effort, and preparing for us next time this little chapter entitled 'Instincts and their vicissitudes'.

Remember this, regarding externality and internality – this distinction makes no sense at all at the level of the real. The real is without fissure. What I teach you about Freud's convergence with what we may call philosophy of science is that we have no means of apprehending this real – on any level and not only on that of knowledge – except via the go-between of the symbolic.

The real is absolutely without fissure. Let us not conceal the flaw in theories initially so appealing, even fruitful, as that of von Frisch. Reciprocal holism, taking an *Umwelt* to correspond to an *Innenwelt* is a *petitio principii* right at the

<sup>6</sup> English in the original.

outset of biological investigation. It may be of interest as a hypothesis, but nothing obliges us to think such a thing. The notion of reflected relations of the living being with its environment, the hypothesis of a pre-established harmony, even if we give it the broadest sense, is a premise whose validity nothing goes to demonstrate. If other modes of research, such as atomism, associationism, etc., against which we can raise all kinds of criticisms, are more fruitful, it is because they move away from this hypothesis, because without knowing it they place symbolism in the foreground. They project it into the real, they imagine that it is the elements of the real which are of relevance. But it is simply symbolism which they bring into operation inside the real, not by virtue of projection, nor as a framework of thought, but by virtue of being an instrument of investigation. The real is without fissure. And in that hypothetical state of auto-enclosure which is presupposed by Freudian theory to be that of the subject right at the start, what could it possibly mean to say that the subject is everything?

M. VALABREGA: *The problem doesn't arise apropos of the real, but apropos of the distinction between apparatuses with relations to the real and the non-relational ones.*

The distinction is drawn between what is included in the narcissistic relation and what isn't. It is at the seam where the imaginary joins the real that the differentiation takes place.

## 2

Last time I wanted to give you an initial insight into the meaning of the question – what happens beyond the pleasure principle? My great friend Jean Hyppolite, who isn't here today because he is in Germany, told me he had read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* again. I think he is at least as busy as most of you. So, it's time to think of reading. In a fortnight we will talk about it again text in hand.

Last time I told you that symbolism is essential to all the most basic manifestations of the analytic domain, namely to repetition, and that we must think of it as tied to a circular process of the exchange of speech. There is a symbolic circuit external to the subject, tied to a certain group of supports, of human agents, in which the subject, the small circle which is called his destiny, is indeterminately included.

I make an image, I incurve my thought, you do realise that that's not quite how understanding comes about.

A certain exchange of relations, both external and internal, takes place which has to be represented as a speech that is recited. With a recording machine, one could isolate it, preserve it. For the most part, it escapes the subject, who doesn't possess the recording machines in question, and continues, comes back, always ready to re-enter the dance of the inner speech.

Naturally, the subject can spend his entire life without making out what it's about. It is after all what most commonly happens. Analysis is made for him to make out, for him to understand in what circle of speech he is caught, and by the same token into what other circle he must enter.

Now we are going to retrace our steps and talk about the *Entwurf*.

It is a manuscript which Freud didn't publish, and which was discovered. It dates from September 1895, so from before *The Interpretation of Dreams*, from the period during which Freud was engaged in, not his self-analysis, but simply his analysis, that is to say when he was on his road of discovery. It tells us how Freud conceived of the psychic apparatus. This text is vital to the history of Freud's thought and, in the light of the punctuation which we will give it, it reveals the signification of what was to follow, of the theory of the *Traumdeutung*. It tells us how Freud was forced to rework his original conceptions. You will see the dream machine join up with this machine whose sketch I gave you earlier on apropos of the discourse of the other, and many others.

Today Anzieu will give us an analysis of what should be brought out in this text.

#### *Interventions in the course of Anzieu's presentation.*

In 1895, the theory of the neuron hadn't got anywhere. Freud's ideas on the synapse are entirely original. He plumps for the synapse as such, that is to say for rupture in continuity from one nerve cell to the next.

What we are given as being the vitalist system, the reflex arc, according to the simplest schema of stimulus-response, seems to obey solely the law of discharge. There is a pure and simple general inertia. The circuit is drawn shut by the shortest path. To this, Freud tags on a buffer-system, a system inside the system, from which the ego system originates. The reality principle is here introduced in reference to the  $\psi$  system, turned towards the inside. Later on, the terms will criss-cross.

The  $\omega$  system is already a prefiguration of the id system. Explain what makes its invention necessary. For, when all is said and done, until then, everything worked very well. Not the least bit of consciousness. But it must nonetheless be brought back in, and Freud does so in the paradoxical form of a system which has quite exceptional laws. The period has to pass through it with the minimum expenditure of energy, with almost no expenditure of energy – he can't say none at all.

Here for the first time we find ourselves faced with this difficulty, which reoccurs at every turn throughout Freud's work – one doesn't know what to do

with the system of consciousness. Very special laws must be attributed to it, and it has to be placed outside of the laws of energy equivalence which govern the movements of quantity. Why can't he dispense with bringing it in altogether? What is he going to do with it? What function does it have?

.....

Apropos of states of desire, what Freud puts into play is the correspondence between the object which appears and the structures already constituted in the ego. He stresses the following – either what appears is what is expected and that isn't in the least interesting – or it doesn't work out well and that's very interesting, for any kind of construction of the object world is always an attempt to rediscover the object, *Wiederzufinden*.<sup>7</sup> Freud distinguishes two completely different structurations of human experience – one which, along with Kierkegaard, I called *ancient*, based on reminiscence, presupposing agreement, harmony between man and the world of his objects, which means that he recognises them, because in some way, he has always known them – and, on the contrary, the conquest, the structuration of the world through the effort of labour, along the path of repetition. To the extent that what appears to him corresponds only partially with what has already gained him satisfaction, the subject engages in a quest, and repeats his quest indefinitely until he redisCOVERS this object.

The object is encountered and is structured along the path of a repetition – to find the object again, to repeat the object. Except, it never is the same object which the subject encounters. In other words, he never ceases generating substitutive objects.

Within this theory, which seems to hold up, we find then the first hint, at a materialist level, of the process of the function of repetition as structuring the world of objects.

This is the sketch of this fruitful something which is going to be the foundation of the psychology of conflict, and which makes a bridge between libidinal experience as such and the world of human knowledge, which is characterised by the fact that, for the most part, it escapes from the field of the forces of desire. The human world isn't at all structurable as an *Umwelt*, fitting inside an *Innenwelt* of needs, it isn't enclosed, but rather open to a crowd of extraordinarily varied neutral objects, of objects which no longer even have anything to do with objects, in their radical function as symbols.

.....

The ego experiences reality not only in so far as it lives it, but in so far as it neutralises it as much as possible. And this takes place to the extent that the system of derivation comes into play. You didn't put enough stress on the fact that Freud locates the process of derivation in the branching of neurons, thus

<sup>7</sup> See SE I 329 and GW II/III 572; Stud II 540; SE V 566.

accounting for the fact that the scattered and individuated influx of energy doesn't pass through. And it is to the extent that it doesn't pass through that a comparison becomes possible with the information which the system gives us in terms of periodicity, namely on account of the energy reduced, not perhaps in its potential, but in its intensity.

.....

In this initial sketch of the ego, there is a first hint of what will be revealed to be like the structural condition of the construction of the object world in man – the rediscovery of the object. But the reference to the other, which is also essential to the structuration of the object, is completely missing. In other words, as in Condillac's *statué*, the objectivated organisation of the world seems to be a matter of course. And the discovery of narcissism for us takes on all of its significance for not having at all been perceived by Freud at this earlier point in time.

Following the path of eighteenth-century philosophers, and like every one else at the time, Freud reconstructs everything, memory, judgement, etc., starting off from sensation, and only stopping for one moment in the quest for the object in itself. But he finds himself returning to the primary process in so far as it concerns sleep and dreams. And this is how even this mechanical reconstruction of reality still leads to the dream.

Let us stop there for today. Does Valabrega want to assume responsibility for establishing the link with the completed theory of the primary and secondary processes in the *Traumdeutung*?

26 January 1955

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## Play of writings

MADNESS IS NOT DREAMING  
 FOUR SCHEMATA  
 OPPOSITION AND MEDIATION  
 THE PRIMARY PROCESS  
 THE ENTIFICATION OF PERCEPTION-CONSCIOUSNESS

Yesterday evening, after Lang's talk,<sup>1</sup> Lefèvre-Pontalis made the following comment to you all, that we should control ourselves about the mirror stage.

His remark has my assent, in that its use should not be abused. The mirror stage isn't a magic word. It's already a bit dated. Since I put it out in 1936, it's about twenty years old. It's beginning to be in need of a bit of renovation – which isn't always for the best, for in order to make progress, one should know how to go back over things. It isn't so much repeating it that is a bore, as not using it properly. And in this respect, Lang gets full marks.

### 1

(*M. Lefèvre-Pontalis arrives.*)

Ah, here comes the rebel! I assure you that there is something it's possible you, Lefèvre-Pontalis, have not the faintest idea about, which is the extent to which the diagnosis of psychosis in a child is debated and debatable. In a way, one never knows if it is a good thing to use the same word for psychoses in children and in adults. For decades, everyone refused to believe that there could be genuine psychoses in children – one sought to link the phenomena to various organic conditions. Psychosis isn't structured at all in the same way in the child and in the adult. If we legitimately speak of psychosis in children, it is because, as analysts, we can advance a step further than the others in our conception of psychosis.

As we don't yet have a doctrine on this subject, not even in our group, Lang was in a difficult position.

The greatest confusion still reigns when it comes to adult psychosis, *a fortiori* concerning child psychosis. But if Lang's work seemed to me entirely

<sup>1</sup> On 1 February 1955, Dr J. L. Lang led a discussion at the Société Française de Psychanalyse under the title 'A psychoanalytic approach to psychosis in the child'.

appropriate, it is because he tried to do something which is indispensable when it is a matter of analytic understanding, and especially when one goes up to the limits, namely  $\perp$  stepping back.

There are two dangers in anything related to the understanding of our clinical domain..

The first is not to be sufficiently curious. Children are taught that curiosity is a terrible fault, and on the whole, it's true, we aren't curious, and it isn't easy to generate this feeling in an automatic way.

The second is to understand. We always understand too much, especially in analysis. Most of the time, we're fooling ourselves. One thinks one can do a good therapeutic analysis if one is gifted, intuitive, when one has made contact, if one puts to work the genius which each person deploys in an interpersonal relation. And from the moment one doesn't demand extreme conceptual rigour of oneself, one always finds some way to understand. But one is left without a compass, you know neither where you started, nor where you are trying to get to.

Can the contrast with the psychosis of children enlighten us as to what we should think about adult psychosis? That is what Lang tried to do, and he did it very well. With great tact he pointed out the incoherences, divergences and gaps in the systems of Melanie Klein and of Anna Freud, to the benefit, in the end, of Melanie Klein, because the system of Anna Freud is, from the analytical point of view, in an impasse.

I really liked what he said about regression. He pointed out that it was a symbol, and not a mechanism which will occur in reality. You know that I don't like to resort to the term of magical thought at every turn, but this is indeed something which resembles a magician's thought. Do we ever see any adult actually regress, return to the state of a small child, start wailing? Regression doesn't exist. As Lang remarks, it is a symptom which must be interpreted as such. There is regression on the plane of signification and not on the plane of reality. In the child, it is sufficiently well borne out by the simple observation that he hasn't much room to regress in.

I reread a note in *The Interpretation of Dreams* about the processes and mechanisms of the psychology of the dream, in which Freud cites Jackson – *Find out all about dreams and you will have found out all about insanity.*<sup>2</sup>

Well, that's just not true. It's got nothing to do with it. Get that clear in your heads. They indubitably work with the same elements, the same symbols, and one can find analogies between them. But that isn't our way of looking at things. It all hangs on this – why isn't a dream madness? Or inversely, what needs to be defined in madness is how it is that its determining mechanism has got nothing to do with what happens every night in dreams.

<sup>2</sup> (1900a) GW II/III 575: Stud II 542: SE V 569 n2.

You mustn't think that this should all be credited to Freud. The French edition is incomplete, and doesn't mention that it is a kind of good mark given to Ernest Jones, who had thought it worthwhile to make this link, which he no doubt thought appropriate for linking analysis up with what was already well thought of in England. Let us render up to Jones that which is Jones's, and to Freud that which is Freud's. And don't let go of the idea that the problem of the dream leaves all the economic problems of psychosis completely unresolved.

I can't tell you more about that today. This is a foretaste of things to come. We may be able to start thinking about psychosis already this year. In any case, we will have to devote ourselves to it next year.

## 2

Let us return to Freud's text.

I asked Valabrega to continue the commentary, but I will immediately draw you a schema on the blackboard, to which you will be able to refer so as to grasp the trend of what is being explored here. In fact, I will draw four schemata, of comparable structure, whose differences illustrate the progress of Freud's development.

The first refers to what is sketched out in his first general psychology, which wasn't published, and constituted a reference for himself, full of fruitful insights. The second brings it up to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the theory of the psychic apparatus having the explanation of the dream for its object. Take good note of the fact that – after he had supplied all the elements for the interpretation of dreams, he still had to give an account of the dream as psychical function. The third refers to the level of the much later theory of the libido. It isn't at all coeval with the *Three Essays*, but rather correlative with the advent of the function of narcissism. Finally, the fourth schema – *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Although they refer to entirely different functions, these schemata are somewhat similar in form. In fact, they are always schemata of the analytic field. At the beginning, Freud calls that *psychic apparatus*, but you will see the advances he makes, the advances in his conception with respect to what we can call the human being.

That is what it is about. Behind your exigencies at the theoretical level, behind, for instance, Lefèvre-Pontalis's call yesterday evening, there's the idea that you are confronted with something individual, if not unique, that everything is there, concentrated in the form of what is in front of you, that that is the unity of the object in psychoanalysis, if not in psychology, whose limits and laws are thought to be knowable.

All of you believe yourselves still to be within the domain of psychology, and that the psyche is a kind of double, a kind of property, of this something you see.

It is very odd that you don't grasp the fact that all scientific progress consists

in making the object as such fade away. In physics, for instance, the further you advance, the less you grasp the object. What pertains to the order of perception interests physicists only at the level of exchanges of energy, atoms, molecules, which only produce the perceptible appearance in a contingent and transitory way.

This isn't to say that for us the human being fades away.<sup>3</sup>

You must know, being philosophers, that being and the object aren't at all the same thing. From the scientific point of view, we cannot grasp being, of course, since it doesn't belong to the scientific order. But even so, psychoanalysis is an experience which delineates, if one can say it, its vanishing point. It stresses that man isn't an object, but a being in the process of becoming, something metaphysical. Is that our object, our scientific object? Certainly not, but neither is our object the individual who apparently embodies this being.

In every dream, Freud says, there's an absolutely incomprehensible point, belonging to the domain of the unknown – he calls this the navel of the dream.<sup>4</sup> Such things aren't emphasised in his text because people probably think it's poetry. It isn't. It means that there is a point which cannot be grasped in the phenomenon, the point where the relation of the subject to the symbolic surfaces. What I call being is that last word, which is certainly not accessible to us in our scientific position, but whose direction is indicated to us in the phenomena of our experience.

What matters to us is knowing where we have to locate ourselves in our relation to what we call our partner. Now, if there is anything that is obvious, it is that there are two different dimensions in this unique phenomenon of the inter-human relation, although they never cease getting caught up with one another – one is that of the imaginary, the other is that of the symbolic. In some way, they criss-cross, and we must always know what function we have, in what dimension we are located, in relation to the subject, in a way which produces either an opposition, or a mediation. To think that these two dimensions are in fact one, because they are mixed up together in the phenomenon, is simply wrong. You end up with a kind of magical communication, a universal analogy, which is what many people base the theorisation of their experience on. In the concrete and the particular, it can often be very rewarding, but can in no way be developed, and is liable to every error in technique.

All this is very abbreviated, but it will both be made precise and illustrated by the fourth schema, which corresponds to the last stage in Freud's thought, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

<sup>3</sup> The verb here, 's'évanouir', also means 'to faint'. Cf. Lacan's later usage of 'fading' (English in the original) apropos of the movement of the subject, e.g. E 835.

<sup>4</sup> See (1900a) GW II/III 115 n2; Stud II 130 n2; SEIV 111 n1.

## 3

*Interventions in the course of M. Valabrega's presentation.*

What is Freud calling the system  $\phi$ ? He starts from the schema of the reflex-arc in its simplest version, which offered such hope of grasping the relations of the living being with its environment. This schema displays the essential property of the system of relations of a living being – it receives something, an excitation, and it responds with something.

Don't forget that the notion of response always implies that we are dealing with an adapted being. This reflex-arc schema came out of the first experiments on frogs, for instance, at the time when electricity, which, as you will see, will teach us so many things as a model, was starting to make its appearance in the world. The frog is electrically stimulated, or else a drop of acid is placed on its leg. It scratches this leg with the other – that's what one calls the response. There isn't just the afferent-efferent pair. One must also assume that the response has a purpose, which is to say that the living being is an adapted being.

All this is taken on by Freud when he begins his construction. And already he seems to include in it the notion of equilibrium, in other words a principle of inertia. But that isn't at all legitimate. The stimulus that Valabrega calls somewhat prematurely information, is nothing more than an *in-put*,<sup>5</sup> a *put-inside*. This is a pre-scientific way of approaching the problem, it dates from before the introduction of the notion of energy, and even from well before Condillac's statue. There is no consideration of energy in this basic schema. It is only when Freud takes into account that what happens in the  $\phi$  system must have an affect on the  $\psi$  system, that the notion of a quota of energy comes up. And it is only then that he specifies that the  $\psi$  system has to deal with internal promptings, that is to say needs.

What are needs? They are things which are closely linked to the organism, and which are clearly distinguishable from desire. Yesterday evening, Lang was deplored the fact that desire is always confused with need, and, indeed, it isn't at all the same thing. Need<sup>5</sup> expresses how this system, which is a special system within the organism, connects up with the general homeostasis of the organism. Here therefore the notion of energy constancy necessarily comes up, already emerging at this point in Freud's work, in transversal fashion. Freud considers that there is an energy equivalence between  $\psi$ , which experiences something from within the organism, and  $\phi$  which produces something related to its needs. That becomes completely mysterious – we are absolutely ignorant as to what it might mean, to say that there's an equivalence of energy between the internal pressure, tied to the equilibrium of the organism, and what results

<sup>5</sup> English in the original.

from it. So what use does it serve? It's an  $\alpha$ , which, after having been used as a starting point, is totally abandoned.

Freud can't be satisfied with the in-put,<sup>6</sup> with what is brought in from the external world, and he has to improvise. So he introduces a supplementary apparatus,  $\omega$ . We said it already last time, all this is a play of writing.

The task is to build everything up from notions of energy, that is to say, from the idea that in order to pull a rabbit out of a hat, one must first put it in it. For something to come out, something must go in. Everything will be constructed on this basis. Most probably it involves the system of perception. Let us not be premature and call it consciousness. In what follows, Freud confounds it with the system of consciousness, but he has to introduce the latter as a supplementary hypothesis. Why? Because he needs not only stimuli from the external world, but the external world itself. He needs an internal apparatus which reflects not only the stimuli of the external world, but also, in a manner of speaking, its structure.

Freud isn't a Gestaltist – one cannot give him credit for everything – but he does sense the theoretical demands which gave rise to the Gestaltist construction. Indeed, so that a living being doesn't perish every time it turns round, it must possess some adequate reflection of the external world. This tells you that this schema is in fact based on what will later be isolated in the term 'homeostasis'. We find this here already in the notion of an equilibrium which has to be conserved and of a buffer-zone, which maintains the excitations at the same level, which therefore serves as much for not recording as for recording badly. It records, but in a filtered fashion. The notion of homeostasis is therefore already there, implying something which is called an energy both at the entry and the exit.

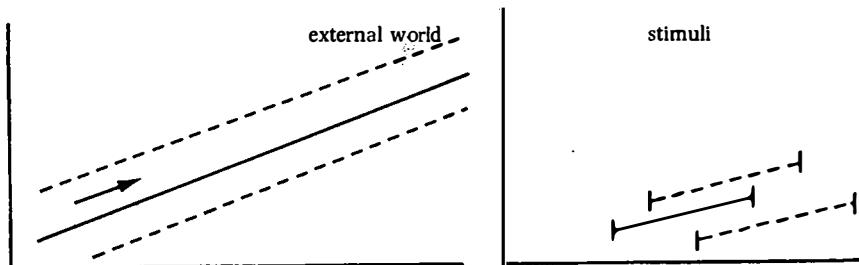
Except, this schema proves to be inadequate. If the nervous system in fact operates a filtering, it is an organised, progressive filtering, which brings with it facilitations.<sup>7</sup> However, nothing here entitles one to think that the facilitations will ever have a functional utility. The sum total of all these facilitations, the events, the incidents which have occurred in the development of the individual, constitutes a model which provides the measure of the real. Is that the imaginary? The imaginary must indeed be here. But as such it includes an intervention from the *Gestalten* predisposing the living subject to a certain relation with a typical form which specifically corresponds to it, it presupposes a biological coupling of the individual with an image of its own species, with the images of what is biologically useful for it in a determinate environment. Of this, there is no trace here. There is only a zone of experience and a zone of facilitation.

<sup>6</sup> English in the original.

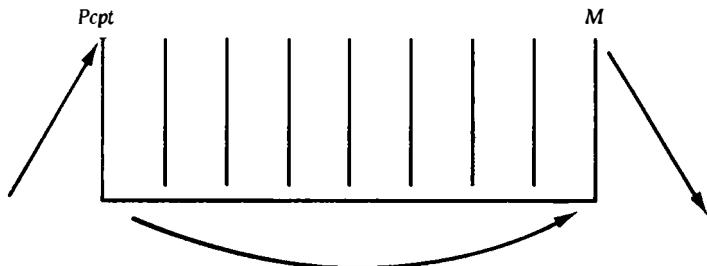
<sup>7</sup> Freud's term is '*Bahnung*', translated in SE (and here) as 'facilitation', and in the French edition as '*frayage*'.

In short, memory is here conceived of as a succession of engrams, as the sum of a series of facilitations, and this conception proves to be completely inadequate if we don't introduce the notion of image into it. If one assumes that a series of facilitations, a succession of experiences, brings into existence an image in a psychic apparatus conceived of as a simple sensitive sheet, it goes without saying that as soon as the same series is reactivated by a new excitation, pressure, a need, the same image is reproduced. In other words, all stimuli tend to produce hallucinations. The principle of operation of the  $\phi$  apparatus is hallucination. That is what *primary process* means.

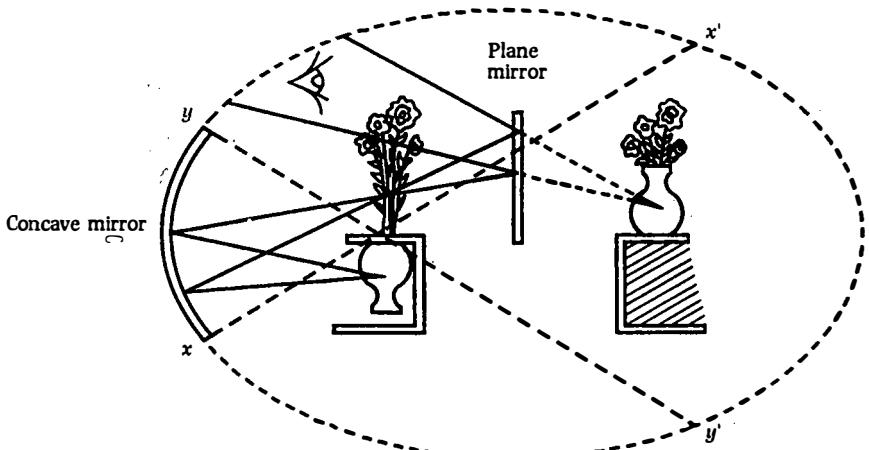
From then on the problem is that of the relation of hallucination to reality. Freud is led to reinstate the consciousness system and its paradoxical autonomy, from the point of view of energy. If the sequence of experiences has hallucinatory effects, there must be a correcting apparatus, a test of reality. This test of reality presupposes a comparison between the hallucination and something which is given in experience and preserved in the memory of the psychic apparatus. From then on, the price for having wanted to eliminate completely the consciousness system is that Freud is forced to reinstate it with an added autonomy.



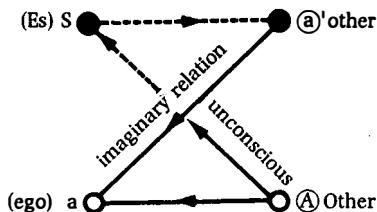
First schema of the psychic apparatus in the *Entwurf*



The psychic apparatus in the *Traumdeutung*



Optical schema for the theory of narcissism



The imaginary function of the ego and the discourse of the unconscious

I'm not saying that this is illegitimate. But you can see where it leads. What detours will he have to take in order to conceive of this reference comparison between what is given in experience in the system  $\psi$ , the buffer-system, the homeostasis system, which moderates the promptings, and the registration of these promptings? To what supplementary hypothesis is he brought? In effect the supplementary hypotheses provide the measure of the difficulties he faces.

They can be grouped under the two headings which Valabrega distinguished – inhibitions and information.

The system  $\omega$  is made up of differentiated organs which do not register the massive energies coming from the external world. One can imagine energies so massive – changes in temperature, considerable pressures – that they put into question the continued existence of the living organism. If it is no longer capable of buffering, there isn't much else for it to do but take flight. But that is

absolutely irrelevant to what is interesting. What concerns us here are the relations of the psyche with the subtle determinations of the external world. Take solar energy – the specialised apparatus retains only a part of the phenomenon. It selects a certain frequency, gets in tune, not really with the energy as such – what would we be like as transformers, photoelectric cells? – but with the period. When an eye receives light, it retains far less energy than a green leaf, which does all sorts of things with this same light. Freud is therefore led to identify quality as pertaining to the specialised apparatus, implying the almost complete erasure of any energy contribution.

You do perceive that the notion of an exclusively perceptive discharge corresponds, in this apparatus, to a simple need for symmetry. He really is obliged to concede a certain constancy of energy as well, and that what is let in must turn up again somewhere.

But the emphasis is placed on the fact that between excitation and discharge, there is the minimum displacement of energy. Why? Because this system must be as independent as possible of displacements of energy. He is obliged to detach, to distinguish from the energy, pure quality, that is, the external world seen as a simple reflection.

For there to be a comparison, a common scale, between the inside, where the image depends only on memory, where it is hallucinatory by nature, and the outside, the ego, doubly emphasising the regulatory function of this buffer, must allow the maximum inhibition of the passage of energy through this system. What enters as a prompting, already considerably filtered, must be filtered again, so it can be compared with the specific images which arise in consequence of need. What has to be ascertained is the level of the pressure of the need, whether it will impose itself in the face of all counter-evidence, or whether the quantity of displaced energy can be sufficiently buffered, sifted, by the ego for it to realise that the image isn't actually real.

In other words, thinking within the tradition that starts with the reflex and little by little succeeds in deducing the entire gamut – perception, memory, thought, ideas – Freud is led to construct a consciousness-perception which is turned into an entity within a system. Which is not completely absurd. This differentiated system does exist, we do have some notion of it, we can even locate it more or less. It demarcates two zones in the psychic apparatus – a zone of imagination, of memory, or better still of memorial hallucination, in relation to a perceptual system which is specialised as such. Here consciousness is a reflection of reality.

*M. VALABREGA: Yes, but that comes to light only much later. Freud still doesn't as yet have a clear idea of the notion of the psychic apparatus which he will set up later with the perception-consciousness system. Here, there are only the elements.*

The elements, that's  $\omega$ .

M. VALABREGA: *They aren't conceived of as being what he will later call the psychic apparatuses.*

On the contrary I think that the apparatuses as such are already present here. Why would he call them  $\psi$ ,  $\phi$ ,  $\omega$  if he didn't distinguish them as being apparatuses?

M. VALABREGA: *In what follows, he distinguishes two basic elements in the  $\psi$  system itself, and that is what yields the psychic apparatus.*

But what I want to show you next time is precisely that the term psychic apparatus is totally inadequate to cover what is in the *Traumdeutung*, where the temporal dimension begins to emerge.

M. VALABREGA: *When it comes to the ego and the indications of reality, there are three distinctions to be made. Firstly, if the ego is in a state of desire<sup>8</sup> at the time when the indication of reality appears, a discharge of energy through the specific action takes place. This first case simply corresponds to the satisfaction of the desire. Secondly, an increase in unpleasure coincides with the indication of reality. The system  $\psi$  reacts by initiating defence through a lateral investment.*

That means that the quantity of energy passing through several neuronic filters arrives with a smaller level of intensity at the synapses – that's the electrical schema. If you pass a current down three or four wires instead of one, each of these wires will require less resistance, in proportion to the number of wires. Finally, thirdly, if neither one nor other of these two cases occurs the investment can augment without hindrance, in accordance with the dominant tendency.

#### 4

Judgement, thought, etc., are inhibited discharges of energy. Freud was to continue to employ this construct, when he later said that thought is an act carried out with a minimum level of investment. It is in a way a simulated act. That it is a reflection of the world must be conceded, in as much as experience obliges us to posit a neutral perception – I say *neutral* from the point of view of investments, that is to say, a perception with minimal investments.

If animal psychology has made any progress, it is in so far as it has emphasised lines of force in the world, in the *Umwelt* of the animal, lines of forces, configurations which are for it preformed points of appeal corresponding to its needs, that is to say to what is also called its *Innenwelt*, the structure linked with the preservation of its form.

<sup>8</sup> Here, as elsewhere, Freud's 'Wunsch' is rendered in French by 'désir', which has here been translated by 'desire'. The corresponding passages in the *Project* are thus those dealing with 'wishful states' (see SE I 319ff).

In fact, it isn't enough to speak of the homeostasis of energy. The needs of a crab aren't those of a rabbit, and the one isn't interested in the same things as the other.

But explore just the field of perception of a rabbit, a crab, or a bird. Offer a rat or a chicken something it finds eminently desirable, food, the object which satisfies one of its needs, and systematically place this object in correlation with a form or a colour. It's amazing, the number of things which a chicken, even a crab, is capable of perceiving, whether it be through senses analogous to ours – sight, hearing – or through apparatuses which have every indication of being sensory apparatuses without our being able to give them an anthropomorphic analogue – in the case of grasshoppers, for instance. In any case, you will see that the sensory field which is at the disposition of a given animal is extremely extended in comparison with what acts so as electively to structure its *Umwelt*. In other words, there isn't just a simple coaptation of the *Innenwelt* to the *Umwelt*, a preformed structuration of the external world as a function of needs. Each animal has a zone of consciousness – we say *consciousness* in as much as a reception of the external world inside the sensory system occurs – much larger in scope than anything we could structure in the way of preformed responses to its pivotal needs.

In a certain sense, this corresponds closely with the schema's generalised sensitive layer. Man has in fact much more information about reality than he could acquire through the simple pulsation of his experience. But he lacks what I call the preformed paths. Man starts with nothing at all. He has to learn that wood burns and that you mustn't throw yourself into the void.

It isn't true that he must learn all of that. But what does he know at birth? It's ambiguous. It is likely that he learns it, but by paths other than those of the animal. He already has a certain detector, a certain knowledge – in Claudel's sense, *co-nnaissance*<sup>9</sup> of reality, which is none other than these *Gestalten*, the preformed images. It is not only a necessity for Freudian theory to admit it, but something which animal psychology requires – either there is a neutral recording apparatus, which constitutes a reflection of the world, which we call, with Freud, conscious, or there isn't.

Except, in man, it becomes visible with the particular configuration we call consciousness, in as much as the imaginary function of the ego comes into play. Man gets to see this reflection from the point of view of the other. He is an other for himself. This is what gives you the illusion that consciousness is transparent to itself. We aren't present, in the reflection; to see the reflection, we are in the consciousness of the other.

As you can see, the rational schema of the psychic apparatus proposed by Freud isn't elaborated, and this is what makes for the thanklessness of our

<sup>9</sup> Literally 'co-birth', a pun on 'connaissance' ('knowledge').

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discourse today. It is the first occasion on which Freud spreads his wings. Everything is simultaneously crude, ambiguous, and, in certain respects, superfluous, and yet, nonetheless, it was to be fruitful.

The notion of equivalence, for instance, is here a bastard notion. Needs exist, Freud says, and these needs push the human being into reactions aimed at satisfying them. Now, this notion, far from being vitalist, far from being forcibly introduced into the pseudo-mechanistic schema, is in reality an energetic notion. The quantity of neuronal energy is there from the start. The conjunction of this conception with the experience of the dream will produce a striking transformation in the schema, as you will see.

All this probably seems sterile and archaic to you. But what's important for us is to grasp what in this schema opens on to the future, and forces Freud's conception to develop. It is not at all, as Kris would like to have us believe, that Freud moved from a mechanistic to a psychological conception, a crass opposition which doesn't mean anything. He never did abandon his schema. He elaborated it in his theory of the dream, without marking, nor even perceiving, the differences, and he thus took the decisive step which introduces us into the psychoanalytic domain proper. There is no such thing as Freud's conversion to organo-psychological thought. It is always the same thought unfolding. One might say that his metaphysics never changes, but that he completes his schema, by introducing something entirely different into it, namely the notion of information.

Learn how to let your thoughts dwell on these thankless moments, and don't forget that these are the first moments of a creative thought, whose development carries us far beyond.

2 February 1955

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## From the *Entwurf* to the *Traumdeutung*

ENTROPY TAKEN LITERALLY  
THE PARADOXES OF OMEGA  
EVERYTHING IS ALWAYS THERE  
DREAM AND SYMPTOM  
THE CONVERSATION WITH FLIESS



It is a fundamental law of all healthy criticism that it applies to a work the very principles which it itself employs in its own construction. Try, for instance, understanding Spinoza according to the principles which he sets up for himself as being the most valuable for the conduct of thought, for the reform of the understanding.

Another example – Maimonides, also someone who gives us certain keys to the world. Within his work, there are explicit warnings as to the manner in which one should conduct one's research. Applying them to the work of Maimonides himself enables us to understand what he meant.

So it is a law with a quite general application which leads us to give a reading of Freud which tries to apply to the work itself the rules of comprehension and understanding which it formulates.

### 1

Three seminars ago, I began to initiate you into the comprehension, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, of this  $\alpha$  which is called either *automatisme de répétition*, or *Nirvana principle*, or *death instinct*, depending on the case. You have already heard me invoke the notion of entropy. It isn't arbitrary. Freud himself indicates that what he is talking about must be something of the sort. It isn't a question here of taking Freud literally. However, many an analyst, indeed some of the best ones, notably Bernfeld, have failed to forgo the pleasure of making themselves ridiculous in this way.

Bernfeld is an analyst of repute, who knew how to discover one of Freud's childhood memories, behind the veil of anonymity with which the latter had cloaked it when he wrote it up as a *screen memory*. Freud had presented it in a camouflaged manner by attributing it to a patient, but the text itself, not biographical detective work, but the very structure of the text, enabled Bernfeld to show that it couldn't be a real dialogue with a real patient, that it had to be a

transposition, and that the example had to have been taken from Freud's life, which he demonstrates by comparing it to two or three dreams from *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Those of you who heard my commentary on the *Ratman* know the passage.

Bernfeld, therefore, some ten years after the publication of the major text which we are in the middle of commenting upon, gave, with Feitelberg, in the *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* for 1931, an account of I know not what, for which no language has a name, which is a piece of research. The title of it is – *The Principle of Entropy and the Death Instinct*. They tried to study the paradoxical pulsation of entropy within a living organism, to be more exact, in man's nervous system, by comparing the brain and the rectal temperature. In this way they thought to acquire evidence of paradoxical variations, that is to say, variations not conforming to the principle of entropy as it functions in physics for an inanimate system.

It is very odd to read it, if only because it indicates the aberrations which taking a theoretical metaphor literally can lead to.

In fact for Freud it is a matter of understanding human behaviour. To this end, he wonders whether there might not be room for employing a category analogous to those used in physics. So he introduces the dimension of entropy in so far as it is found in the analytic situation, this novel form of communication. One must keep a hold on all of these dimensions, in order to understand Freud's proposals, which concern not only the living organism as objectifiable at the psychic level, but the signification of its behaviour, precisely in so far as it comes into play in this particular relation, the analytic relation, which can only be understood as a communication. That is the framework which gives the comparison between the death instinct and entropy its meaning. To take this analogy literally, to translate it into the precise terms used in physics, is a misinterpretation as absurd as the work of Borel's monkey typists. Only too often will we have to decry in analysts the work of monkey typists.

Throughout these four stages of Freud's thought that I've mentioned – indicated by the unpublished manuscript whose commentary we are now bringing to completion, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the constitution of the theory of narcissism, and finally *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* – the difficulties and the impasses are reproduced each time in a modified form. We are going to follow out this kind of negative dialectic, which implies the persistence of the same antinomies under transformed guises, so that we bring out the autonomy, the true order, of what it is Freud is tackling, which he endeavours to formalise.

You cannot but know, after a year and a half of seminar here, that this order is the symbolic order, with structures proper to it, with its own dynamism, with the mode specific to the manner in which it intervenes so as to impose its

coherence, its economy, which is autonomous to the human being and his experience. It is through that that I indicate to you the originality of the Freudian discovery. Let us say by way of illustration for those who don't understand anything, that the symbolic order is what is most elevated in man and what isn't in man, but elsewhere. To the extent that he makes progress in his synthesis, Freud is always forced to reinstate, to restore this external, excentric, point. We are now going to try to rediscover the stages of this progress in the text.

## 2

The other day I described to you the  $\psi$  system, as crudely representing the reflex-arc, based on the notion of quantity and of discharge, with a minimum of content. Freud, trained in neurological, anatomo-physiological and clinical disciplines, is not satisfied with the model on offer from positivist physiology at the time, namely, a reflex architecture – higher reflexes, reflexes of reflexes, etc., up to the reflex of unity located at the level of the higher functions. And one would still have had to add to it something which our friend Leclaire would, on one of his good days, call the subject. I hope that one day he will get rid of that as well, for the subject must never be represented anywhere.

Freud has to produce something different. What he produces isn't an architecture, but a buffer.

Freud is here already ahead of neuron theory, he anticipates Foster and Sherrington by two years. The genius in him emerges here, right down to the smallest detail, apropos of some of the properties of conduction – he guessed more or less what we know today. Of course, there have been experimental advances, which have confirmed the functioning of the synapses as contact barriers, and that is the way in which he already puts it. The important point is that in the process leading to the act of discharge, he interposes a buffer-system, an equilibrating system, a system which filters, damps down the system  $\psi$ . Moreover, to what does he compare it? In this schema, you can see within a spinal arc, something which looks like a ball – it's a ganglion. Well, in his view, psyche is a ganglion, the brain is a differentiated ganglion, of the sympathetic kind, like the chain of nerves in insects.

My dialogue with Valabrega last time was a little wayward – he said some things which weren't wrong about the system  $\omega$ . Freud can't get by without the intervention of this system of consciousness as a reference to this reality out of which, try as one might, one will never manage to pull a rabbit without having put it there in the first place. With Freud at least, no one tries to make you believe that piling up enough things is sufficient to make what's on top that much more beautiful than it was when it was at the bottom.

Freud's experience forces him to remodel the structure of the human subject

by decentring it in relation to the ego, and by shifting consciousness to a no doubt essential, but problematic, position. I would say that the elusive, irreducible nature of consciousness with respect to the functioning of living things is something which, in Freud's work, is as important to grasp as what he tells us about the unconscious.

The difficulties which this system of consciousness raises reappear at each level of Freud's theorising. Freud doesn't succeed in finding a coherent model of it, and this isn't due to the existence of the unconscious. While he can give a coherent, balanced account of the majority of the other parts of the psychic apparatus, when it's a question of consciousness, he always encounters mutually contradictory conditions.

I'll give you an example. In one of his papers, called 'A metapsychological supplement to the theory of dreams',<sup>1</sup> published in French in the collection *Métapsychologie*, he explains almost everything which happens in dementia praecox, in paranoia, in dreams, in terms of investments and disinvestments – notions whose importance in his theory we will have to ascertain. We are led to believe that a theoretical construction can always be made to work, made to hang together somehow. Not so. The apparatus of consciousness has quite special properties, and the very coherence of his system, the necessity of his deduction, brings Freud up short. We fail to understand how, he says, this apparatus, in contrast to the others, can function even when it is not invested. When it comes to the conscious system, the paradoxes gather.

Why this failure? It isn't because Freud doesn't know how to go about it -- he had all the time in the world. If he didn't succeed, there must be a reason.

Here, for the first time, we see the appearance of the paradox of the system of consciousness – it both has to be there, and not be there. If it is included in the energy system as constituted at the  $\psi$  level, it won't be any more than a part of it, and won't be able to play its role as reference to reality. Still, some energy has to go through it. But it can't be directly linked to the external world's massive input, as is presumed in the first, so-called discharge, system, that is, of elementary stimulus-response reflex. On the contrary, it must be completely separated off from it, and it must receive only slight investments of energy, which allow it to come into operation, such that the movement always goes from  $\phi$  to  $\psi$  and it is only from  $\psi$  that  $\omega$  receives minimal energy, thanks to which it is capable of beginning to vibrate.

On the other hand, beginning with what happens in  $\omega$ , the system  $\psi$  needs information, as Valabrega said the other day, which I found somewhat hasty, but not false in itself. It can only find this information at the level of the discharge of the perceptual system.

The reality test thus takes place in the psyche. Take the example of a properly

<sup>1</sup> (1917d) GW X 377–91; Stud X 241–53; SE XIV 321–33.

perceptual motor discharge. Movements in the eye occur as a result of the visual accommodation, of fixation on the object. In comparison with the hallucination of desire, in the process of being formed in the psyche, that is what theoretically should force the issue – Should I believe my eyes? Is this really what I'm looking at? Now, the motor discharge, the properly motoric aspect of the operation of the organs of perception, is precisely that part which is totally unconscious. We are conscious of seeing, and nothing seems to us more homologous to the transparency of consciousness than the fact that we see what we see – seeing imposes its own transparency on itself. But on the other hand, we are not in the least bit aware, except in a very marginal, limitrophe, way, of what we are doing, efficaciously, actively, in a motoric sense, in this synchronisation, in the palpation at a distance which the eyes undertake when they try to see.

So a series of paradoxes begin to be sketched out in relation to the system  $\omega$ . I wanted to emphasise it because it hints at something which we will find over and over again at every level.

Next, there's the model you'll find in chapter VII of the *Traumdeutung*, 'The dream process'.<sup>2</sup>

Here, there's a support. Here, something will form a ladder between the perceptual system and the motor system. Here, we find the various layers which constitute the level of the unconscious. Then, there's the preconscious, consciousness, whose paradoxical repositioning you can already see – here it is now, on both sides.

The first model tried to give a true representation of an apparatus, which one then tried to get working. It was an apparatus which was somewhere, with organs of perception, cortex and sub-cortex, functioning like a kind of autonomous ganglion, regulating the pulsation between the drives [*pulsions*] internal to the organism, and the manifestations of research outside. It was a question of the instinctual [*instinctuelle*] economy of the living being in quest of what it needs.

Now it is no longer an apparatus. The schema refers to something far more immaterial. Freud underlines this fact – the things he will talk about must not be given spatial location. In the text, he tells us that there is something it must be like. Remember what I told you last year during the lectures on transference, about the optical images which are nowhere. They are seen at a given place when one is somewhere else to see them. That's what this is about.

Freud's schema has changed meaning. He puts the temporal dimension as such on the blackboard – that too is emphasised in the text. This schema, whose general arrangement you can see remains the same, proves then that Freud is already introducing new dimensions into his categories, and in particular a certain logical dimension.

<sup>2</sup> 'Psychology of the dream-processes' in the English translation: 'Zur Psychologie der Traumvorgänge' in the German text.

Even though that could have been embodied in a mechanical model, we have moved on from a mechanical to a logical model.

Before turning to the third model, I would like to remind you that I promised you I'd say something about cybernetics. Why are we so astonished by these machines? It may have something to do with the difficulties Freud encountered. Because cybernetics also stems from a reaction of astonishment at rediscovering that this human language works almost by itself, seemingly to outwit us.

One thinks everything is resolved by saying that it's the little chap who put it there. Which is what we're reminded of by Lévi-Strauss, who is always so wise when faced with new things, and always seems bent on turning them back into old things. I usually like what M. Ruyer writes, but not his book on cybernetics.

Language is certainly there, completely vibrant, in these machines. And it's no small thing that we recognise it by a little song that gives us the greatest pleasure, as I am going to tell you. I discovered it the other day at the Société de Philosophie.

Mme Favez-Boutonier had just given a very good paper on psychoanalysis. She had said things she hoped would be understood by the philosophical audience present there. To be sure, she was too modest in her claims, yet, nonetheless it was way over the top of what a lot of people had managed to understand up until then. Thereupon, M. Minkowski got up, and said what I've heard him say for the last thirty years, regardless of the nature of the talk on psychoanalysis he has to comment on. Between what Mme Favez-Boutonier had just contributed and what he heard thirty years ago on the same topic, from the mouth of Dalbiez, there was a world of difference. And yet, he said exactly the same thing. I don't want to take issue with him personally – that is what usually happens in a scientific society. Why has the paradoxical expression *thinking-machine* been created? I who say that men think only very rarely, I'm not going to speak of thinking machines – but all the same, what happens in a thinking machine is on average on an infinitely higher level than what happens in a scientific society. If you give a thinking machine different elements, it, at least, answers something different.

From the point of view of language, these little machines purr something new for us, perhaps an echo, an approximation let us say. One can't resolve the issue simply by saying that it is the builder who put it there. The language came from outside, that's understood, but it isn't enough to say that it's the little chap who put it there. If anyone has something to say on the matter, it's the psychoanalyst, who is constantly reminded that the matter isn't closed by believing that the little genius of a chap did it all.

The big question for the human sciences now is – what is language? One wonders – where does it come from? What happened during the geological epochs? how did they begin to wail? did they begin by making noises while making love, as some would have it? – whereas it is above all a matter of

knowing how it actually works now. Everything is always there. Our relation to language must be grasped at what is, for us, the most concrete, everyday, level, that of our analytic experience.

That is what's important in the schema which gives complexity to the system by introducing into it the imaginary as such. We rediscover the little optical schema I showed you last year in the third stage, in the theory of narcissism. It places the perception-consciousness system where it belongs, namely at the heart of the reception of the ego in the other, for all imaginary references of the human being are centred on the image of the fellow being.

Finally, the last schema will enable us to interpret *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and to understand to what necessity this work answers. Freud wrote it at the time when analytic technique was taking a turn, at a time when one might have thought that resistance and unconscious signification corresponded to one another as right side out to inside out, such that what works according to the pleasure principle in the so-called primary system appears as reality in the other, and vice versa. That is quite straightforwardly the classical study of the ego, a little enriched by the notion that a lot of things can be comprehended in its syntheses. Freud maintains that this isn't it, that not all of the system of significations is to be found in the little chap, that his structure isn't a synthesis of these significations, rather the contrary.

I am giving you this last model so as to put you on the track of what it is Freud wants to contribute with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. I'll take something which has to do with our modern machines' modes of transmission, an electronic tube. Anyone who's played around with a radio is acquainted with a triode valve – when the cathode heats up, the little electrons bombard the anode. If there is something in the way, the electric current does or doesn't pass, depending on whether it is positive or negative. One can modulate the passage of the current at will, or more simply make it an all or nothing system.

Well, that's what resistance, the imaginary function of the ego, as such, is – it is up to it whether the passage or non-passage of whatever there is to transmit as such in the action of analysis occurs. To start with, this schema shows that, if there were no interposition, no resistance from the ego, no frictional effect, no lighting up, no heating effect – call it what you will – the effects of communication at the level of the unconscious would not be noticeable. But above all it shows that there is not the slightest sense of the relation of the ego to the discourse of the unconscious – this concrete discourse in which the ego bathes and plays its function of obstacle, of interposition, of filter – being one of negative to positive. The unconscious has its own dynamic, its own flow, its own paths. It can be explored according to its own rhythm, its own modulation, its own message, quite independently of whatever interrupts it. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud wanted to situate this imaginary function of the ego.

Today I've only given a general outline of the line of development we will

have to pursue in detail. I'll now ask Valabrega to broach the second of these four stages.

## 3

*M. Valabrega gives an account of the principal characteristics of dreams.*

**M. VALABREGA:** *Freud also tells us that the vivacity of the hallucination, its intensity, is proportional to the quantity of investment of the idea in question. It is quantity which conditions the hallucination. It is the opposite of perception. In perception, which comes from the system  $\phi$ , attention makes the perception more or less distinct.*

*It comes from the system  $\omega$ .*

**M. VALABREGA:** *No, from the system  $\phi$ .*

A distinction has to be made. The quantitative contributions of the external world come from the system  $\phi$ . The balance of the text shows that everything which is perception, and not excitation, occurs as such in the system  $\omega$ .

**M. VALABREGA:** *But it comes from  $\phi$ .*

*Because it comes from the external world. It only comes from  $\phi$  by way of  $\omega$ .*

**M. VALABREGA:** *Sure. In any case, it's only a parenthesis.*

In 1897, Freud still hasn't got very far with his own analysis. For Anzieu's benefit, I've made a note of some remarks on the limitations of self-analysis. Letter 75 – *I can only analyse myself with the help of knowledge obtained objectively (as a stranger). Genuine self-analysis is impossible; otherwise there would be no illness. Since I still find puzzles in my patients, they are bound to hold me up in my self-analysis as well.*<sup>3</sup> That is how he defines the limits of his own analysis – he can only understand what he has come across in his cases. At the very time when he is with great brilliance discovering a new path – and it is exceptionally precise testimony, given its early date – he himself points out that his self-analysis isn't an intuitive process, a divinatory mapping out within his own self, that it has nothing to do with introspection.

**M. ANZIEU:** *Before he had the Irma dream, Freud knew that dreams had a meaning. And it was because his patients had brought him dreams whose meaning lay in their being the fulfilment of desire that he wanted to apply it to himself. That's what his criterion of verification is.*

*Exactly.*

<sup>3</sup> *Anf.* 249: SE I 271 (translation modified to accord the German, French and English texts).

M. VALABREGA: *It isn't the meaning of the dream which is at issue, but the theory of the identity of the dream and the neurotic symptom.*

In the *Traumdeutung* Freud insists on the family resemblance between the dream and the neurotic symptom, but also on the difference between them. The dream process is exemplary as regards understanding the neurotic symptom, but he argues that there is an absolutely fundamental economic difference between the symptom and the dream. All they have in common is a grammar. That's a metaphor, don't take it literally. They are as different as an epic poem is from a work on thermodynamics. The dream makes it possible to grasp the symbolic function at play, and it is, on that account, capital for understanding the symptom. But a symptom is always part of the overall economic state of the subject, whereas the dream is a state localised in time, under extremely specific conditions. The dream is only a part of the activity of the subject, while the symptom is spread out over several domains. The processes are more analogous than identical.

.....

*M. Valabrega gives an account of the analysis of the dream of Irma's injection.*

At this time Freud's conversation with Fliess is the speech which polarises, organises his entire existence. This guiding thread runs throughout his entire existence as the fundamental conversation. When all is said and done, Freud's self-analysis takes place within this dialogue. That is what makes Freud Freud, and it is why we still talk about it today. Everything else, the scientific discourse, the everyday discourse, the trimethylamine formula, the things we know, the things we don't know, all that farrago is at the level of the ego. It can just as easily constitute an obstacle as signal the passage of what is in the process of being constituted, that is, this vast discourse addressed to Fliess which the entirety of Freud's work will then become.

Freud's conversation with Fliess, the fundamental speech, which is at this time unconscious, is the essential dynamic element. Why is it unconscious at this time? Because it infinitely surpasses what both of them, as individuals, can at this time consciously apprehend of it. After all, they are just a couple of pipsqueak scientists like any others, exchanging rather weird ideas.

The discovery of the unconscious, such as it appears at the moment of its historical emergence, with its own dimension, is that the full significance of meaning far surpasses the signs manipulated by the individual. Man is always cultivating a great many more signs than he thinks. That's what the Freudian discovery is about – a new attitude to man. That's what man after Freud is.

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## Censorship is not resistance

THE MESSAGE AS AN INSISTENCE OF AN INTERRUPTED DISCOURSE  
THE KING OF ENGLAND IS A FOOL  
FREUD AND FECHNER

*The Interpretation of Dreams* does not offer just the theory of dreams. Freud's second working up of the schema of the psychic apparatus is also to be found in it. With the first, he concluded his neurological work. The second corresponds to his advance into the specific field of the neuroses, into what will become the domain peculiar to analysis.

So it is concerned with the dream, but also, in the background, the neurotic symptom, whose structuration proves to be the same – it puts into play the structure of language in general, more precisely the relation of man to language. My commentary will show you this, thereby bringing you testimony as to the fact that the terms used by us here to understand Freud's work anew are included in it.

We want to apply to the development of Freud's thought the same mode of interpretation as Freud employs with respect to what happens in the psychic organ. Something moves, shifts, in relation to these  $\phi$ ,  $\psi$ ,  $\omega$  systems whose characteristics and also impasses, so well perceived by Freud, Valabrega and I have underlined. I urge you to reread the Irma dream. Already last year, I made you read it and explained to you certain of its stages, to illustrate the transference. Read it again in connection with what we are in the process of doing, namely trying to understand what the compulsion to repeat [*automatisme de répétition*] means, trying to give a meaning to this expression, and to this end, trying to grasp to what duplicity of relations between the symbolic and the imaginary we are led.

The schema from last time, that of the triode valve, already puts Irma's dream in a different light for you. In his manuscript, Freud reduces its themes to four elements, two conscious, two unconscious. We have already pointed out how these two unconscious elements should be understood – one is the revelation of the creative speech of the dialogue with Fliess, the other is the transversal element, illuminated by the passage of this current. What is on display in an almost unconscious way in the dream, is the question of Freud's

relations with a series of feminine sexual images, which are all caught up with some element of tension in his marital relations. What is even more striking is the essentially narcissistic character of all these feminine images. These are fascinating images and all of them have a certain narcissistic relation to Freud. Irma's pain, when the physician percusses her, is in the shoulder, and Freud mentions that he suffers from rheumatism in the shoulder.

All this is always said in a way which amazes us, and which enables us to see beyond what Freud himself was capable of grasping at the time. The point is that Freud is an exceptional, absolutely brilliant observer. In what he has given us, we always have more of what we call, for the sake of rapidity, *material*, to orientate us, than what he himself had conceptualised of it, which makes him an exceptional case in the history of scientific literature.

## 1

*M. Valabrega starts the commentary on 'The psychology of the dream processes', chapter VII of The Interpretation of Dreams.*

There are two small sentences which, from the point of view we're following out here, deserve to be noted. Just when Freud once again puts into question all the constructions built up in the preceding chapters, in relation to the dream-work, which constitutes the bulk of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he all of a sudden says that all objections can be answered apropos of dreams, including that the dream may perhaps be only the dream of a dream.<sup>1</sup>

*In short, we have treated as Holy Writ what previous writers have regarded as an arbitrary improvisation, hurriedly patched together in the embarrassment of the moment.*<sup>2</sup>

Let us look at this metaphor in passing, because in Freud metaphors are precious - he indeed treated the dream as Holy Writ. Holy Writ is interpreted according to very special laws, and everyone knows that sometimes these interpretations surprise. A great importance must also be accorded to the word *text*.<sup>3</sup> We are here getting much closer to what Valabrega is trying to show us - just when he starts talking about the dream process, Freud comes to the question of forgetting.

Well, the distortion, even the forgetting, of the text of the dream is of such minor importance, Freud tells us, that were there to remain only one element, an element one had doubts about, a tiny tit-bit, the shadow of a shadow, we could continue to accord it a meaning. It's a message.

Its distortion is not due to chance, it isn't linked to a kind of deadening, of

<sup>1</sup> See GW II/III 516-18; Stud II 491-3; SE V 512-14.

<sup>2</sup> GW II/III 518; Stud II 492-3; SE V 514.

<sup>3</sup> The German phrase rendered as 'Holy Writ' is '*einen heiligen Text*', '*un texte sacré*' in French.

erasure, of a drowning of the message in background noise. The message isn't forgotten any old how. Let us restore to the famous censorship we all too often forget, all of its freshness, all of its novelty – censorship is intentional.

What's distinctive about Freud's argument is that it shifts the burden of proof – *In the elements which you raise against me as objections, the forgetting and distortion of dreams, I still see a meaning, and even an additional meaning. When the phenomenon of forgetting comes into play, it becomes all the more interesting to me. I find that to be a part of the message as well. I add these negative phenomena to the reading of the meaning, I also recognise them as having the function of a message.* It isn't just that Freud discovered this dimension, but he even, by taking sides, isolates it, so that that is all he wants to know about.

It is said of him that he only discusses wishful dreams [*rêves de désir*], and yet there are also anxiety-dreams, self-punishment dreams. One of the phases of his answer is to say that, to be sure, anxiety-dreams exist, but what produced that anxiety is nothing other than what would provoke anxiety in waking life. Not everything in dreams interests him, only the semantic element, the transmission of a meaning, an articulated word [*parole*], what he calls the dream-thoughts, *Gedanken*.

What interests Freud, and it is nowhere more in evidence than in the first part of this seventh chapter, is the message as such, and one can go further and say – it is the message as interrupted, but insistent, discourse. Here is something which keeps us in touch with the problem we've got on the table at the moment – what is the beyond of the pleasure principle? What is the compulsion to repeat [*automatisme de répétition*]?

In this text, the word *Gedanken* cannot take a psychological interpretation. Freud repeats it in three or four different passages, let us not imagine that all of our explanations are already well known in the domain of the psyche, they are phenomena of a completely different order from that of the psychological.

Here is an example which is that much more meaningful for being so extreme, that of the lady who is left with only one word from her dream – *channel*. Freud demonstrates to us using this instance what he means by the interpretation of dreams.

What can the memory [*mémoire*] of something so erased be, a memory of a memory? And, more generally, when we remember a dream, do we really remember something which we could speak of as if it were a thought, since we don't know, after all, whether it isn't the very quintessence of the illusion of memory? That doesn't bother Freud, that doesn't matter to him, what he is concerned with isn't of the order of psychological phenomena: Do we remember a dream in the same way as an event which took place and which is locatable somewhere? It is literally insoluble. Philosophers have always been concerned with this – why isn't the experience one has in sleep just as important, as authentic, as that of the previous day? If he dreams every night

that he is a butterfly, is it legitimate to say that he dreams he's a butterfly? But Freud doesn't care.

This psychological realism, this quest for an essential subjectivity doesn't detain him. For him, the important thing is not that one dreams one is a butterfly, but what the dream means, what it means to someone. Who is that someone? That is the important question.

He has already had a conversation with this lady, and the dream is simply its continuation. She apparently accepts many of Freud's propositions, but her associations reveal what she wants to tell him in the dream. Push, push, lady. She finally comes out with a short, funny anti-English story. *From the sublime to the ridiculous, there is only one step – Yes, the Pas-de-Calais.* This is what she means – *All your stories are sublime, but ever so slightly ridiculous, so that it doesn't take much to end up laughing.*<sup>4</sup>

It's not for us to say whether that's legitimate or not, we are commenting on Freud, trying to grasp what the unconscious function of the dream is. One of the dimensions of the dream's wish is to pass a certain word. Making that clear is always enough for Freud to ratify the fact that his theory has been confirmed. He doesn't have to go back to childhood memories, nor to think of regression. What, for Freud, necessitates the theory of regression? That is what the next step will show us. What we may conclude for the moment, is that Freud is only satisfied, is only sure of his way, he only claims to have shown what he set out to, when he can show us that the dream's pre-eminent wish is to pass a message.

M. VALABREGA: *In consequence, the forgetting of the dream is the obstacle.*

It isn't the obstacle, it's part of the text. Doubt, for instance, in his way of looking at it, is almost an *emphasis*<sup>5</sup> – there is no equivalent word in French, one would have to say *soulignage*.<sup>6</sup> Doubt as a psychological phenomenon doesn't interest him, and with respect to dreams, is it even a psychological phenomenon?

The phenomenon of doubt must be interpreted, Freud says, as a part of the message. If the subject doubts, tell yourself it is to do with resistance, but let us not talk about resistance for the moment. Doubt is part of the message. When the subject tells you he had doubts, you must take that to indicate he is drawing your attention to the fact that it is a particularly significant dream-element. Doubt has a privileged connotation in this famous bit of Holy Writ. Alright?

## 2

M. VALABREGA: Yes, . . . *Nonetheless, Freud emphasises the word resistance when he says – Any obstacle to interpretation stems from psychic resistance, Widerstand.*

<sup>4</sup> GW II/III 522 n1; Stud II 496 n1; SE V 517 n2.

<sup>5</sup> English in the original. <sup>6</sup> 'underlining'.

Not quite. Did you read the short note as well?<sup>7</sup> If the father of the patient dies in the course of the analysis, he says, we are not about to claim that he made him die just to interrupt his analysis, that's a resistance. We classify everything which stands in the way of interpretation as a resistance – it is a matter of definition. We are going to interpret that as well according to whether that facilitates or not the progress of the interpretative task, that is the passage of the message. You must admit that this generalisation of the theme of resistance allows one to think that he doesn't include it in a psychological process. Resistance only acquires value in relation to work. It isn't at all considered from the point of view of the subject's psychic properties.

Resistance does exist, of course. We know of the existence of imaginary or psychological frictions, which constitute obstacles to what Freud calls the flow of unconscious thoughts. The short note is consistent with what I am telling you, that resistance is not thought of as being internal to the subject, on a psychological level, but uniquely in relation to the work of interpretation.

M. VALABREGA: Widerstand is *also censorship*.

No, that's the point, it isn't censorship.

M. VALABREGA: *But it is, monsieur*.

No, it isn't censorship. Censorship isn't located on the same level as resistance. It is part of the interrupted character of the discourse.

I feel that this is an important disagreement, that there is some sort of lack of understanding on your part, and that I'll have to give you some kind of illustration.

In the strict sense, the subject's resistance is linked to the ego's register, it is an effect of the ego. In this chapter, it is an *x* designating everything, whether psychological or not, whether coming from reality or by accident, which halts analytic work. Censorship has nothing to do with resistance, neither in the first sense, nor – though nonetheless a great deal more – in the second.

This brings with it the question of what we call the super-ego. I'm telling you about the interrupted discourse. Well, one of the most striking forms of interrupted discourse is the law in so far as it is not understood. By definition, no one is taken to be ignorant of the law, but it is never understood, for no one can grasp it in its entirety. The primitive who is caught up in the laws of kinship, of alliance, of the exchange of women, never has, even if he is very learned, a complete vision of what it is in this totality of the law that has a hold over him. Censorship is always related to whatever, in discourse, is linked to the law in so far as it is not understood.

This may seem a bit far fetched to you, but I will try to illustrate it.

There is a small pornographic work, written by someone with an eminent

<sup>7</sup> GW II/III 516 n1; Stud II 495 n1; SE V 517 n1; note added 1925.

literary name, currently a member of the Académie Goncourt, Raymond Queneau. In this book, one of the most delightful one could hope to read, a young typist, who gets caught up in the Irish revolution and some very scabrous misadventures, makes, while locked inside the toilets, a discovery in every respect like that of the father Karamazov.

As you know, his son Ivan leads the latter into those audacious avenues taken by the thought of the cultivated man, and in particular, he says, if God doesn't exist . . . – *If God doesn't exist, the father says, then everything is permitted.* Quite evidently, a naive notion, for we analysts know full well that if God doesn't exist, then nothing at all is permitted any longer. Neurotics prove that to us every day.

The typist, locked in the toilets, makes what is a still more impressive discovery for someone who's a subject of His Majesty. Something happens to disturb the maintenance of order in Dublin, which leads her into doubt, a doubt which leads to the following formulation – *If the King of England is an idiot, then everything is permitted.* And from then on her entire adventure – she is aided by the course of events – goes to show how she no longer denies herself anything. The title of the book has to be – *One is always too good to women.*

Indeed, for the subjects of His Britannic Majesty – that's the hypothesis, don't get the idea that I'm slandering our English allies – it is very important that one shouldn't say that the King of England is an idiot. This can be expressed, for instance, in the following law – any man who says that the King of England is an idiot will have his head cut off.<sup>8</sup> Listen carefully. What will follow from that?

This may seem funny to you, but I want it to seem tragic. And I want to show you that any similar law, any primordial law, which includes the specification of the death penalty as such, by the same token includes, through its partial character, the fundamental possibility of being not understood. Man is always in the position of never completely understanding the law, because no man can master the law of discourse in its entirety.

If it is forbidden to say that the King of England is an idiot, under pain of having one's head cut off, one will not say it, and in consequence of this sole fact, one will be led into not saying a great many other things – that is to say, everything which reveals the glaring reality that the King of England is an idiot.

Everything goes to show that the King of England is an idiot. We have had some examples. And one King of England who wasn't an idiot was immediately called upon to abdicate. He differed from the others in that he kept falling off his horse and aspiring to marry the woman he loved – this obviously indicated he wasn't an idiot, and he was immediately asked to take his intimate affairs elsewhere. What does that mean? Is it sufficient not to be an idiot to find one's salvation? That is a mistake – that isn't enough either. I'm not trying to say that

<sup>8</sup> See Freud (1909d) GW VII 403; Stud VII 53; SE X 179.

the King was right to agree to abdicate because he wasn't an idiot. But this is an aside.

It follows then that everything in the discourse which is of a piece with this reality, that the King of England is an idiot, is put in suspense. The subject is caught up in the necessity of having to eliminate, to extract from the discourse everything pertaining to what the law forbids one to say. Now, this interdiction as such is not at all understood. At the level of reality, no one can understand why one would have one's head cut off for saying this truth, no one grasps where the very fact of the interdiction is located. From then on, one can no longer suppose that someone who says what mustn't be said and has the idea that everything is permitted will be able purely and simply to annul the law as such.

I hope I'm giving you a feeling of this final, unexplained, inexplicable mainspring upon which the existence of the law hangs. The tough thing we encounter in the analytic experience is that there is one, there is a law. And that indeed is what can never be completely brought to completion in the discourse of the law – it is this final term which explains that there is one.

What happens according to this hypothesis? The subject of the King of England has many reasons for wanting to express things which have a most direct relation with the fact that the King of England is an idiot. Let us say that it passes into his dreams. What does this subject dream of? – it has to do with something difficult to express, not only because the King of England is an idiot, but with everything connected to it, with everything which makes it such that he cannot be anything but an idiot, with the entire structure of the regime, and beyond, with the universal connivance in the idiocy of the Kingdom of England. Well then, the subject dreams that he has his head cut off.

No need to ask yourself questions about I-know-not-what primary masochism, about self-punishment, about the desire for chastisement. On this occasion, the fact that he has his head cut off means that the King of England is an idiot. That is censorship. It is the law in so far as it is not understood.

At the level of the dream, it is only a little child's problem – why does one dream that one has one's head cut off? Why does that tickle you so? But ponder the fact that not one of the subjects in this kingdom where idiocy reigns has a very solid head on his shoulders. That is expressed by a symptom.

What I'm telling you has the appearance of being a small apologia, but I knew a subject whose writer's cramp was tied, as his analysis revealed, to the fact that in the Islamic law, within which he had been raised, a thief has his hand cut off. He never could stomach that. Why? Because his father had been accused of being a thief. He spent his childhood in a kind of deep suspension in relation to Koranic law. The whole of his relation with his original milieu, everything solid, the judiciary, order, the basic coordinates of the world were barred, because there was one thing he refused to understand – why someone

who was a thief should have his hand cut off. Furthermore, for this reason, and precisely because he didn't understand it, it was he who had his hand cut off.

That is censorship in so far as there can never be any relation with the law in its entirety, since the law is never completely made one's own.

Censorship and super-ego are to be located in the same register as that of the law. It is the concrete discourse, not only in so far as it dominates man and makes all kinds of fulgurations appear, it doesn't matter what, everything which happens, everything which constitutes discourse, but in so far as it gives man his own world, which we, more or less accurately, call cultural. It is in this dimension that censorship is located, and you can see in what way it differs from resistance. Censorship is neither on the level of the subject, nor on that of the individual, but on the level of discourse, in so far as, as such, it constitutes, all by itself, a full universe, and at the same time there is something irreducibly discordant about it, in every one of its parts. It takes very little, very little at all, being locked up in the toilets, or having a father falsely accused of Lord knows what crime, for the law all of a sudden to appear to you in a lacerating form. That is what censorship is, and Freud never confuses *Widerstand* with censorship.

M. VALABREGA: *At the end of the paragraph, he establishes that the forgetting of the dream is intentional. That is where I find the psychoanalytic theory of forgetting. Freud replaces the explanation of the formation of the dream by the discharge of tension, as he still employed it in the text of the Project, by the idea that sleep slackens censorship, and that it moreover permits one to skirt around resistance. There still may be a confusion between the two concepts, but . . .*

But here, that's true, because he's introducing the psychology of sleep. Up until then, Freud never concerned himself with sleep, but here he is obliged to point out its original contribution. There is an essential relation between the ego and sleep. In sleep, the ego doesn't have the same attitude as in the waking state. Once the theory of the libido has been developed, Freud will then assume that there is a withdrawal of libido and its involution once again into the ego. It is in as much as its resistances can be skirted around, traversed or filtered – I am talking about the resistance of the ego, of the resistance tied to the ego, which is only a small part of the resistance – that the conditions in which the phenomenon which we assume to be permanent occurs, namely the continuation of the discourse, are found to be modified. What do these two chapters mean – if it isn't that the discourse of the dream coheres with the discourse of the previous day? Freud always refers the one to the other – what does the subject say in his dream, given what he said the previous day? The entire dialectic of this chapter rests on this relation. All the relations, all the differences, all the processes not seen up until then, ignored, which make the proper object of the *Traumdeutung*, are established at this level.

**M. VALABREGA:** *In consequence, he ties resistance and disguise together in a dynamic way. He writes, for instance, that under the pressure of the censorship – he also uses the expression the resistance of the censorship.<sup>9</sup>*

Which proves that they aren't the same thing. Otherwise he wouldn't have to say resistance of censorship. The censorship is on the same level as the transference. There is a resistance of censorship, just as there is a resistance of transference. Here it's a matter of censorship and transference in so far as they oppose the work of analysis. When two words are equivalent, like the word *colour* and the word *colour*, you don't say a *colour of colour*.

### 3

#### *Interventions in the course of M. Valabrega's exposition.*

Freud had a real grasp of the notion advanced by Fechner in his psychophysics. Fechner's psychophysics doesn't at all stem from the elementary psychologising dimension where his vulgarisation is to be found. The rigour of his position leads him to suppose that, since there is a parallelism between consciousness and the quantifiable domain in physics, at least virtually, in the abstract, the possibility of there being phenomena of consciousness must be extended way beyond animate beings. Which goes to show that ideas, even when they are first introduced as valid hypotheses, take their authors away, much further away from the run of the mill. If Freud refers to it, it isn't simply as a nice phrase, a happy analogy. Freud never does things like that. Freud isn't Jung. He doesn't spend his time finding all the echoes. When Freud puts something in his text, it is always extremely important. And when he mentions to Fliess, in a letter, what a revelation it had been for him when he read the passage in which Fechner says that one can only conceive of dreams as being located in another psychic locality, one must give this note its full weight.

This is precisely what I am telling you – the psychic locality in question is not psychic, it is quite simply the symbolic dimension, which is of another order – in Angelus Silesius there's a play on the words *Ort* and *Wort*, we will come back to it. To say that the dream is placed in another psychic locality is to say that it isn't simply circumscribed as the parenthesis of sleep. It is placed and defines itself in another locality, governed by different local laws, the place of the symbolic exchange, which is not to be confused, although it is embodied in it, with the spatio-temporal dimension in which we can locate all human behaviour. The structural laws of the dream, like those of language, are to be found elsewhere, in another locality, whether we call it psychic or not.

<sup>9</sup> GW II/III 535; Stud II 507; SE V 530.

M. VALABREGA: *Let us move on to the schema on pages 537–8, whose essential characteristic is that its directionality is like that of a reflex apparatus. Freud explains that this directionality stems from the requirement that one explain psychic processes on the model of reflex processes.*

Wait a moment. As you are reminding us, Freud justifies the introduction of this directionality by retroactively clinging on to his reflex apparatus. After all, he says, it is a property of the reflex apparatus that things only go in one direction. But what is remarkable, is that he emphasises this fact only at this one moment. Up until then, he was concerned, when dealing with these three apparatuses,  $\phi$ ,  $\psi$ ,  $\omega$ , with equilibrium phenomena, which had to be considered as reversible – equilibrium, one always comes back to it, going either forwards or backwards. Now, all of a sudden – you have to know how to spot the passage – Freud introduces the notion that things happen in a determinate and irreversible succession. The word *irreversible* isn't there, but it is sufficiently hinted at for my taste and I hope also for yours, by the expression *zeitlichen Folge*,<sup>10</sup> temporal sequence, and *Richtung*. That's not all. At the very moment when he introduces temporal succession, he finds himself, for reasons of internal conceptual consistency, having to tell us about the exact opposite, namely, that paradoxical thing which will be called regression, and which will have such a dominant influence on the development of psychoanalytic thought.

In passing I'll note that this was the issue in yesterday evening's discussion of Schweich's lecture – for those of us who are going into fields that are still little understood, like that of psychosis, how should we understand the notion of regression? What meaning are we to give to the fact that a subject has regressed to the oral stage?

Freud gets involved in a series of antinomies, of which the following one isn't the least significant – the more the desire is linked to its biological root, to biological force, the more it has a tendency to manifest itself in a hallucinatory guise. You must admit that that is a paradox. We find, for instance, further on in the text, this formulation, that dreams reveal to us a kind of primitive state of humanity.<sup>11</sup> That means that primitive man, in so far as his means of subsistence were less than ours, would have been sustained by dreaming. We have had, besides, to swallow a great many other things about primitives – we were told that their thought was prelogical. These things mustn't be taken on trust.

In short, the explanation of dreams by regression leads Freud into fundamental contradictions at all levels, and for every form he gives this regression, he encounters an objection. He has to find some kind of primitive perceptual plan, so he talks of a topographical regression, from whence the

<sup>10</sup> GW II/III 542; Stud II 513; SE V 537–8.    <sup>11</sup> GW II/III 554; Stud II 524; SE V 548.

allegedly hallucinatory form which desire assumes under certain conditions. But the neuronal circuit can only go in one direction, the propagation of nervous excitation is never reversed. So topographical regression raises many a problem. Temporal and formal regression produce equally severe antinomies.

This reading shows us the direction in which Freud's thought had later on to develop. The theory of the ego, for instance, articulated in 1915 on the basis of narcissistic libido, resolves the problems raised in this schema by the various forms of regression.

This will be the subject of our next seminar, in two weeks. You see the restricted conditions under which we can legitimately employ the terms resistance, censorship and regression.

*16 February 1955*

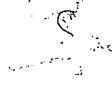
## The difficulties of regression

WHO IS THE SUBJECT?

PARADOXES OF THE FREUDIAN SCHEMATA

PERCEPTION AND HALLUCINATION

FUNCTION OF THE EGO



Today we are going to pick up the thread of our commentary on the seventh part of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, with the aim of integrating it within the general line we are pursuing – understanding what the progress of Freud's thought means, given due respect for what can be called the primary foundations of the human being such as he discovers himself in the analytic relation, and this in order to explicate the final stage of Freud's thought, which finds expression in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Last time we got to the first paragraph in 'The psychology of the dream-processes', which concerns the forgetting of dreams. That led me, following a difference of opinion which made itself manifest apropos of a certain correction I made to Valabrega's remarks, to construct a little analogue which gave precision to the difference that exists between censorship and resistance, censorship and the resistance of censorship. The resistance is everything which is opposed, in a general sense, to the work of analysis. Censorship is a special qualification of this resistance.

What's important for us is to know where the subject of the analytic relation is to be found. One must be on one's guard against the naive attitude – *the subject, why, that's him of course* – as if the patient were something univocal, as if the analyst himself amounted to nothing other than a given sum of individual characteristics. Who is the subject? That is the question we are dealing with here in all its aspects, in the antinomies which it reveals. We pursue it to all the points at which it is reflected, refracted, signalled. This is how we hope to give a feeling for the point of its precise location, which cannot be tackled head on, since to tackle it is to tackle the very roots of language.

### 1

In this perspective, look at one of these things one doesn't usually stop at, a little note included in the masonry of the Freudian edifice.

*A second factor* – that of knowing why the preconscious has rejected and stifled the wish [désir] which belongs to the unconscious – which is much more important and far-reaching, but which is equally overlooked by laymen is the following. No doubt a wish-fulfilment must bring pleasure; but the question then arises 'For whom?' You see that this question, for whom? is not just ours. It isn't my student Leclaire who invented it – For the person who has the wish, of course. But, as we know, a dreamer's relation to his wishes is a quite peculiar one. He repudiates them and censors them – he has no liking for them, in short. So that their fulfilment will give him no pleasure, but just the opposite; and experience shows that this opposite appears in the form of anxiety, a fact which has still to be explained. Thus a dreamer in his relation to his dream-wishes can only be compared to an amalgamation of two separate people who are linked by some important common element.<sup>1</sup>

Now here's a small text I propose to you as liminal to your reflection, for it expresses clearly the idea of a decentring of the subject. It is a propadeutic formulation, not a solution. It would be turning the problem into a thing to say there's another personality. Moreover, we didn't have to wait for Freud to tell us that – a gentleman named Janet, a worker not without merit even though eclipsed by the Freudian discovery, had thought that he had in fact observed that in certain cases a phenomenon of double identity came about in the subject, and he stopped there, because he was a psychologist. For him it was a psychological curiosity, an observational fact – which comes down to the same thing – *historiolas*, Spinoza used to say, little stories.

Freud, for his part, doesn't set things out in the form of a little story, he raises the essential aspect of the problem – what is the meaning? When he says *thoughts*, that is what he is specifying, and nothing else.

We must be precise – what is the meaning of the behaviour of our neighbour, when we are placed with him in this very special relation inaugurated by Freud in his approach to neuroses? Must we look for the answer in some exceptional, abnormal, pathological features of the other's behaviour? That isn't what Freud does. He seeks the answer by asking the question just where the subject himself can ask it of himself – he analyses his own dreams. And it is precisely because he talks about himself, that he makes it apparent that someone other than himself talks in his dreams. That is really what he imparts to us in this note. Someone else it would seem, a second character has a relation with the being of the subject. That's the question raised in Freud's work, from its beginning to its end.

Think of the little *Project*, from the time of his beginnings. We saw that, at each moment, while keeping to an atomistic language, Freud deviates from it, because he raises the problem of the relations of the subject and the object, and

<sup>1</sup> GW II/III 586 n1; Stud II 552 n1; SE V 580 n1; the translation is adapted slightly from SE.

he does so in remarkably original terms. Wherein lies the originality of this sketch of the human psychic apparatus? In that it is in fact about the subject.

What distinguishes Freud here from all the authors who have written on the same subject, and even from the great Fechner to whom he constantly refers, is the idea that the object of the human quest is never an object of rediscovery in the sense of reminiscence. The subject doesn't rediscover the preformed tracks of his natural relation to the external world. The human object always constitutes itself through the intermediary of a first loss. Nothing fruitful takes place in man save through the intermediary of a loss of an object.

I think that this feature, which we have noted in passing, didn't escape you, but you may have thought it was only a point of detail – the subject has to reconstitute the object, he tries to find its totality again starting from I know not what unity lost at the origin. This theoretical symbolic construction – which, to the extent that they are applicable to clinical experience, the initial discoveries concerning the nervous system suggest to Freud – already makes it possible to foresee what must, after all, be called the metaphysical import of his work. This is what proves that we are indeed on the right lines, in continually asking afresh Freud's question – what is the subject?

What the subject does makes sense, his behaviour speaks just as his symptoms do, just as all the marginal functions of his psychic activity do. The psychology of the period, as you know, holds the terms consciousness and psyche to be equivalent, and Freud shows at every turn that this is precisely what creates the problem. That is what is made present in this small sketch of the psychic apparatus, which we have more or less finished with. One mustn't confuse, he says, just when he is undertaking the psychological discussion of the dream-processes, the primary process and the unconscious. In the primary process, all kinds of things appear in consciousness. What one wants to know is why it is these which do so. Of course, we are conscious of the idea, the dream-thought, since we would otherwise know nothing about it. Through an exigency of the theory, a certain quantity of interest must have been turned towards what is unconscious. And yet, what motivates and determines this quantity, is in an elsewhere of which we aren't conscious. We have to reconstruct that object as well.

This is what we have already seen made apparent apropos of the dream of Irma's injection, and apropos of the initial small schema Freud gives of it in the *Entwurf*. He shows us that, when one studies the structure and the determination of associations, what appears in the dream as most heavily charged, in terms of quantity, is the point towards which the most things to be signified converge. What results is the point of convergence of maximum psychic interest. But that doesn't cast any light on the motives themselves.

What appears in Irma's dream is doubly determined – there is, on the one hand, the speech of the dialogue being conducted with Fliess, and on the other,

the sexual foundation. The sexual foundation is double. He is interested in this speech, since it is the notion that it exists which thus comes to determine the dream – it is the dream of someone who is trying to find out what dreams are. But also, Freud finds himself in a complex relation not only with his patient, but with the entire, mutually contrasting, feminine series, which is sketched out behind her. What there is in the unconscious can only be reconstructed, that is the meaning to which Freud is leading us. It is what we are going to tackle today, with the second part of chapter VII on regression.

The coalescing of at least two series of motivations is necessary to the production of any symptomatic form. One is sexual, the other is, according to the name we give it here, symbolic – it is the factor of speech, as it is assumed by the subject. But the same question is raised again – by whom? by which subject?

## 2

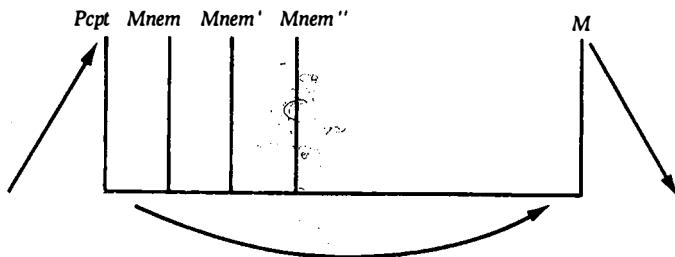
M. VALABREGA: Freud introduces his conception of the psychic apparatus for the first time in relation to the study of regression. So we will have to return to *The Interpretation of Dreams* to find the first explanation of regression, which will later take on a considerable importance in the theory. Freud begins by summarising the three most important features which the analysis of dreams has furnished him with. Firstly, dreams put thought in the present tense through the fulfilment of a wish [désir]. It is an actualisation, and desire, or the thought of the desire, is most often objectified, enacted, lived. Secondly, a feature almost independent of the preceding one and no less important, the transformation of the dream-thoughts into visual images and into discourse – *Bilder und in Rede*.<sup>2</sup>

*Rede* means discourse. The unconscious is the discourse of the other, I didn't make it up. *Bilder* means imaginary.

M. VALABREGA: A third notion, due to Fechner, the psychic locality of the dream being different from the locality of the representation of waking life. There follows the construction of the psychic apparatus. This apparatus is constituted of various systems, which one doesn't have to, Freud tells us, give a spatial order, but rather an order of temporal succession. As a consequence, one mustn't believe in the spatiality of the schema. It is a temporal topography. This is the first schema of the apparatus. It possesses a direction – the psychical process always goes from the perceptual extremity, *Pcpt.*, to *M.*, the motor. Immediately after, there's a first differentiation. The perceptual excitations received by the subject must leave a trace there, a memory. Now, the *Pcpt.* system, perception, has no memory whatsoever. One must therefore distinguish between a *Mnem.* system and the *Pcpt.* system. When there have been simultaneous perceptions, there will be a simultaneous connection of the traces –

<sup>2</sup> GW II/III 539; Stud II 511; SE V 534.

that's the phenomenon of association. But there exist other connections than the associative one. So it therefore becomes necessary to allow for several Mnem. systems – Mnem, Mnem', Mnem'', etc. It would be pointless. Freud says, to try to determine the number, or even to wish to do so. Consider the following diagram:<sup>3</sup>



The text is really rather pithy – *The first of these Mnem. systems will naturally contain the record of association in respect to simultaneity in time; while the same perceptual material will be arranged in the later systems in respect to other kinds of coincidence, so that one of these later systems, for instance, will record relations of similarity, and so on with the others.*<sup>4</sup> We enter here into the dialectic of the same and the other, of the one and the many. You can put the whole of Parmenides into this. And Freud adds – *It would of course be a waste of time to try to put the psychical significance of a system of this kind into words.* Freud realises the foolishness of any attempt at trying to recreate all the categories of language by schematising the various ways in which the elements of reality, atomistically conceived, are organised. The spatial schema of the conceptual connections would only be the doublet of the exigencies of the play of thought, in the most general sense. One can see that Freud is giving up, and that his schema is no longer of any use, except for showing us that where there is a language relation, there has to be the substrate of a determinate neuronal apparatus. Freud realises that it is enough to point out the necessity for there being a series of systems, without wanting to specify each of them in turn. The ease with which he abandons this task, to which more naive people are known to devote themselves, is in itself an education.

Let us take the following sentence – *Its character would lie in the intimate details of its relations to the different elements of the raw material of memory, that is – if we may hint at a theory of a more radical kind – in the degrees of conductive resistance which it offered to the passage of excitation from those elements.*<sup>5</sup> 'Dégradations de la résistance' isn't an accurate translation. Here, something pulls us up short. At

<sup>3</sup> GW II/III 543; Stud II 515; SE V 538.

<sup>4</sup> GW II/III 544; Stud II 515; SE V 539.

<sup>5</sup> GW II/III 544; Stud II 515–6; SE V 539; 'dégradations de la résistance' corresponds to 'Abstufungen des Leitungswiderstandes', translated in SE by 'the degrees of conductive resistance'.

this level, what does the notion of resistance signify? Where can it be located in this schema?

M. VALABREGA: As one can see from the passage that M. Lacan just commented on, this is a critique of associationism. For Freud, association is one connection amongst others, and that is why there are several systems.

That's right. If one must assume all these levels, it's because he shifts implicitly from associationism to what is irreducible to it, the category of resemblance being the first dialectical category.

M. VALABREGA: The memories Mnem., Mnem.', etc., are by their nature unconscious. They can become unconscious. But one must still take note that they have no sensible quality comparable to perceptions. They remain distinct from them. Until now, we haven't taken into account, in the schema, the dream and its psychology. The formation of the dream can only be explained by two basic agencies [instances]<sup>6</sup> – the criticising agency and the criticised agency. The criticising agency forbids access to consciousness, and as a result of this fact finds itself in the closest relation with this consciousness. It is in placing these two agencies, criticising and criticised, in his schema, that Freud arrives at the next schema. The preconscious should be considered as the last of the systems, being located at the motor end. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that one would understand the diagram better if, instead of making it in the form of a parallelepiped, one made it circular, so as to be able to join M. to Pcpt., preconscious phenomena becoming conscious.

Here you are emphasising the problem which, I think, for a long time any reader of good faith has asked himself. Freud recognises here that the system perception-consciousness, *Wahrnehmung-Bewusstsein*, which we find again in the final topography, and at certain points in Freud's account, as the nucleus of the ego, supposes a unity. I say it in passing, we won't be satisfied with this commonly accepted final resting-point of Freud's thought.

Valabrega's remark is worthwhile on its own terms, independently of the attempt at a solution which he proposes. Freud presents something as having a topographical unity which is split at both ends. Let's leave the question open for the moment. To explain just the functioning of his schema, Freud reminds us that the disturbing process, which passes from the unconscious to the preconscious, should normally end up at consciousness – even the denomination of these systems implies this orientation towards consciousness. What is in the unconscious is separated from the conscious, but can pass into it via the preliminary stage of the preconscious. Now the necessity of his schema obliges

<sup>6</sup> 'Agency' is the English translation of *Instanz* (see SE V 537 n1); 'instance' is the French translation. The German and French terms have legal connotations, although the French sense of a 'court' is relatively recent. In *Robert*, 'instance' is given a separate meaning corresponding to that introduced by Freud in 1923, in *The Ego and the Id*.

Freud to locate this system of consciousness just before the possibility of the act, before the motor outlet, hence in *M*. But all the premises which determined the fabrication of his neurological schema obliged him to admit that perception takes place well before any kind of unconscious, at the level of contact with the external world, with the *Umwelt*, that is to say at the other end of the schema. Hence, the way in which the diagram is constructed has the singular consequence of representing as disassociated, at the two terminal points of the directed circulation of psychic movement, two sides of one and the same function, namely perception and consciousness. This difficulty can in no way be attributed to some sort of illusion stemming from spatialisation, it is internal to the very construction of the schema.

The perceptual system is a kind of sensitive layer, sensitive in the sense of photo-sensitive. In another text,<sup>7</sup> Freud describes a well-known little apparatus, a slate board with special properties of adhesivity upon which a transparent paper rests. The pencil is a simple point which, each time it traces signs on the transparent paper, causes a momentary and local adherence of the paper to the slate underneath. Consequently, the tracing appears on the surface, dark on clear or clear on dark, and remains inscribed there as long as you don't detach the sheet from what lies underneath, which triggers the disappearance of the tracing, the paper returning to a virgin state each time the sticky sheet is raised. Freud requires his first perceptual layer to be something of this kind. One must assume that the perceptual neurone, being sensitive matter, is always capable of intercepting a perception. But here, while the surface becomes virgin, some trace of what was perceived at a given moment always remains on the slate.

Such is the logical schema, and there's nothing to tell us it isn't based on the actual functioning of the psychic apparatus, which makes it necessary that the perceptual system be given at the start.

We thus end up with this peculiar local dissociation of perception and memory. From the point of view of the nervous apparatus, one must distinguish between the level of mnemonic accumulation and the level of perceptual acquisition, which is perfectly correct, from the point of view of the imagining of a machine. But we then find ourselves faced with this second difficulty to which Valabrega and I are drawing your attention.

Everything in experience indicates that the system of consciousness must be located at the most extreme opposite point from this succession of layers we have to allow in order to conceive of the effective functioning of the psychic apparatus. Yet again, we suspect that there's something here which doesn't quite work, that there's the same difficulty which, in the first diagram,

<sup>7</sup> 'A note upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"' (1925a) GW XIV 3-8: Stud III 365-9: SE XIX 227-32.

expressed itself as follows, that the system  $\phi$ , the complement to the stimulus-response circuit, and the system  $\psi$  were on two different planes. As for the system  $\omega$ , functioning according to other energy principles, it represented the perceptual system and ensured that something could come into consciousness. In this way the subject received information concerning quality, which could not be provided by the system  $\psi$ , the regulator of investments within the nervous apparatus. So the first schema gave us a representation of perception and consciousness at only one extremity of the apparatus, united together, just as they are in experience. The second schema compounds the difficulties of the first by dissociating the location of the perceptual system and that of the system of consciousness.

M. VALABREGA: — *One ought to be able to establish some sort of connection, I don't know how.*

You offered one solution.

M. VALABREGA: *No, it isn't a solution. In a very brief note in which he assimilates Pcpt. and Cs., Freud talks about the linear succession of the schema.<sup>8</sup> If he had wanted to construct a circular schema, he would have done so. One has to wait for another topography to see the matter clearly. But let's abandon this problem in order to get on to the unconscious, the system located more to the back, which cannot accede to consciousness except by passing through the preconscious. Consciousness is a system which succeeds the preconscious. Here again we come upon this paradox, that the system of consciousness is open both on the side of perception, through which the excitation arrives, and to the motor end, whose most adjacent system is the preconscious. In the case of dreams, the internal excitation tends to pass via the intermediary station of the preconscious in order to become conscious, but it cannot, because the censorship forbids it this path during the previous day. How are we to explain the hallucination, the hallucinatory dream? According to Freud, the only way to get out of this is to admit that the excitation, instead of being transmitted as normal, towards the motor end, follows a retrograde path. That's regression.*

I can see that for today, the attention you're willing to give to quite straightforward things is somewhat wavering. We are confronted by this singular contradiction — I don't know if it should be called dialectical — that the less you understand the better you listen. For I often say very difficult things to you, and I see you hanging on every word, and I learn later that some of you didn't understand. On the other hand, when you're told things that are very simple, that are almost too well known, you are less attentive. I say that in passing — like any concrete observation it has its merits. I deliver it up to your reflection.

<sup>8</sup> GW II/III 546 n1; Stud II 517 n1; SE V 541 n1; this note was added in 1919.

So I'll have to go back over things.

When the notion of regression first comes up, it is strictly tied to a particularity of the schema, the paradox of which I showed you just now.

If we could succeed in fomenting a more coherent schema than the one we're now looking at, in which the perception-consciousness system would not be in this paradoxical position in relation to the apparatus and its one-way functioning, there'd be no need for the notion of regression. It is solely because his schema is made that way that, in order to explain the hallucinatory quality of the dream-experience, Freud has to admit not so much a regression as a regredient direction of the circulation of quantity, expressed by the process of excitation-discharge. This direction is called *regredient* in contrast with the progredient direction of the normal, waking, functioning of the psychic apparatus.

We might well suspect that all this is precarious, since it depends upon the construction of a schema which already in itself appears as paradoxical. Mark this in passing, perhaps it will permit you to shed some light on the manner in which the term regression is employed later on, not without its revealing ambiguities.

It first appears as topographical regression – in some cases, what happens in the nervous apparatus has to move in the opposite direction, that is to say not towards discharge, but towards the mobilisation of the system of memories which constitutes the unconscious system. What has to be explained are aspects of the dream – which, moreover, can only be called sensorial metaphorically speaking – its figuration, especially visual, its hallucinatory character.

So the initial introduction of the term regression in the Freudian system is essentially tied to one of the most inexplicable peculiarities of his first schema. We will see if we can't explain things better, in such a way as to make the notion of regression unnecessary at this level.

M. HYPPOLITE: *Can't one put forward the hypothesis that the idea of regression is for Freud primary in relation to the schema? That he has regression at the back of his mind?*

The point of our way of proceeding is that it reminds us that the schema we are now studying has a continuity with another one – also constructed on the basis of Freud's specific experience, that of the neuroses, which from the start animated his theoretical endeavour – in which there is no trace of the notion of regression. There, no need for regression to explain the dream, its hallucinatory character, desire sustains it.

The schema of the *Traumdeutung* only has this shape because that of the

*Entwurf* had the one I've drawn several times on the board. And it is to the extent that the schema has this shape that Freud talks of a retreat on the topographical level, of swimming up against the nervous current.

There are things which work in the regredient sense in relation to the schema. To account for it, given the way in which his diagram is put together, Freud is forced to enter into supplementary constructions. He had, for instance, to concede that what takes place in dreams is a suspension of the progradient flow, because if the progradient current always passed through at the same speed, the reverse movement could not come about. The notion of regression gives rise to enough difficulties for one to see that Freud is only forced to admit it because he has to explain how things can occur which, in relation to the schema, effectively move in the regredient direction.

His starting point is not at all that of regression. He is obliged to introduce it because he conceives the function of perception in the psychic economy as something primary, not composite, but elementary. For him, the organism is essentially impressionable, the impression is elementary, and it is by virtue of that that it comes into play in what takes place at the level of symptoms.

That is where the whole problem lies – can what happens at the level of the phenomena of consciousness be in any way purely and simply assimilated to the elementary phenomena of perception? What may be said in Freud's favour, is that at this naive level – let us not forget that this was constructed fifty years ago – he doesn't evade the difficulty of the existence as such of consciousness.

Freud's constructions have lost a great deal of their interest for us with the passage of time, that is to say with the diffusion of behaviourist thinking. I want to draw your attention in passing to the fact that, by comparison with Freud's attempt, behaviourist thought is a pure and simple sleight of hand. Of course, the behaviourists say, consciousness raises some problems. Let us resolve the question by describing phenomena without ever taking into account its actual existence. Where it is obviously effective, it is only a stage, let us not mention it. Freud, for his part, doesn't dream of eliminating the difficulty there is in getting consciousness included as a special agency in the entire process and, in the end, he succeeds in dealing with it without turning it into a thing.<sup>9</sup>

Let us return to Freud's first schema. He starts with a nervous system made up of interconnecting neurones, of a  $\psi$  apparatus which is, in the central nervous system, the totality of the association-fibres. How is the circulation which represents the sum of its experiences initiated? How is the passage across the synaptic barrier accomplished? How does the facilitation change? Freud is thus only interested in the neuronal quantity circulating in the fibres. The facilitation depends on the energy level of the system. There is a homeostatic

<sup>9</sup> Lacan employs the neologisms 'entifier', 'chosifier'; although we have not chosen to do so in this passage, we have sometimes employed the neologism 'entification' for these words.

regulation, with variations which depend on the fact that several thresholds, several homeostatic rules, are possible, depending on whether the system is in the waking state, sleeping state, etc. Well then, what happens in this system? What happens is what Freud calls *hallucination*.

The nervous system receives excitations, which come to it from the organism, from the pressure of needs. Certain experiences then occur. As the ordinary notion of learning [*apprentissage*] would have it, the first experiences determine the others. Each time that the same impulse [*pulsion*] reoccurs, the circuits associated with the first experiences, which have been recorded, are aroused. The internal signals, the neurons, which were excited on the first occasion of the organism's activity under the pressure of need, are excited again. In this strictly hallucinatory conception of the putting into play of needs, from which emerges the idea of the primary process, it is normal for the psychic organism, given that it had been in some way satisfied in the original confused experiences linked to its original need, to hallucinate its second satisfaction.

This implies, it should be noted, an identification between the psychical phenomena which occurs in a neuron, and its epiphenomenal verso, that is, what the subject perceives. It pertains to the order of psychophysical parallelism. One must call a spade a spade. If Freud calls that *hallucination*, it is because he places authentic perception elsewhere. This hallucination is simply, according to the then ruling definition in science, a false perception, just as one could, at the same epoch, define perception as a true hallucination.

The return of a need leads to the hallucination of its satisfaction, the entire construction of the first schema rests on that. Except, how is it that the living organism nonetheless succeeds in not falling into terrible traps, biologically speaking? We must necessarily suppose a mechanism of regulation, of adaptation to the real, which enables the organism to refer the hallucination, which spontaneously follows from the primary functioning of the system  $\psi$ , to what is happening at the level of the perceptual apparatus. Something must therefore be constituted in the course of the experiences, something which diminishes the quantitative investment to the level of sensitivity of the incidence of need. This something, Freud locates it in the  $\psi$  apparatus, and calls it an *ego*.

How is the regulation achieved? Freud explains it by the process of derivation. What is quantitative is always susceptible to being diffused. At first there is a traced path, the path opened up, facilitated, by the original experience, which corresponds to a given neuronal quantity. The *ego* intervenes to make this quantity pass along several paths at once, rather than one. As a result, the level of what has passed along the path of facilitation will be sufficiently lowered to be successfully compared on examination with what is happening in parallel at the perceptual level.

You can see the hypotheses all this presupposes – so many are needed, and a great many of them are not susceptible of confirmation. That is the somewhat

disappointing feature of these constructions. But we are not here to judge of their merit in and of themselves – they acquire value from the developments to which they led Freud.

Within this schema, the *ego* is the regulatory apparatus for all the comparative testings of the hallucinations of the system  $\psi$  with what is taken to be adapted to reality at the level of the system  $\omega$ . It reduces the level of excitation of neurons which have already been facilitated to an extremely low energy level, so that the distinctions can be drawn via the system  $\omega$ , where the charges are very weak. I should draw your attention to the fact that the *ego* doesn't belong at the level of the perceptual apparatus. It is in the system  $\psi$  itself, it is at the heart of the psychic apparatus. The primary and secondary processes occur in the same place. In fact, the *ego* and the  $\psi$  apparatus are the same thing – the *ego* is the *nucleus*,<sup>10</sup> that is how Freud expresses it, the kernel of this apparatus.

That is what goes against the hypothesis you proposed just now. The bipartition of the system of the *ego* into perception and consciousness, located so paradoxically in his schema in the *Traumdeutung*, isn't imposed on Freud by a preformed conception – it was more straightforward in the first schema. And why does it appear necessary for it to be the way it is in the second schema? Because the second schema doesn't at all cover the same ground as the first. It is a temporal schema, which tries to represent the order in which things take place. And it is remarkable that Freud encounters this difficulty just when he introduces the temporal dimension.

I leave this question open. Do bring what you have to say to a conclusion, Valabrega.

M. VALABREGA: *Regression remains for Freud an inexplicable phenomenon from the topographical point of view. That is what we might conclude with.*

If you wish. Had we only done this today, had we only shown you that Freud, in his text, remains just as much in difficulties with regression as a fish with a fig, we would still not have wasted our time. There wasn't the least need to introduce it in order to explain the fundamentally hallucinatory character of the primary process, since he had already distinguished the primary and secondary processes in the first schema. He introduces regression from the moment when he emphasises the temporal factors. As a result, he is also forced to admit it into the topographical, that is to say spatial plane, where its appearance is none too steady. It remains paradoxical, and to a certain extent antinomic and inexplicable. That is what had to be emphasised here.

We will see next how the notion of regression must be handled when Freud uses it in the genetic register in relation to the development of the organism.

2 March 1955

<sup>10</sup> English in the original. See p. 43 n1 above.

# XIII

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## The dream of Irma's injection



So we are still pondering the meaning of the diverse conceptions of the psychic apparatus which Freud entertained. He pursued this task throughout the entire course of his work – for him it corresponded to a demand for internal coherence. He was the first and for a long time the only one to try to find his way in all this, and he pursued his effort throughout the modifications, of theory and of technique, suggested by those who followed him, that is, the analytic community.

It is a fact that the difficult question of regression, with which we were confronted last time, was first engendered by the very requirements of the model. One has to read the letters to Fliess in order to know how difficult the begetting of this work was. And for him arriving at rigorous schemata was a requirement which touched him to the heart. Now, to produce a hypothesis about quantity has reverberations for the notion of quality. And I don't think that the two of them are perfectly compatible. Freud preferred one to the other on account of certain conveniences when it came to formulation, but the difficulties of the second schema are due to the relative simplications of the first, that is, this disassociation between perception and consciousness which obliges him to introduce the hypothesis of a regression in order to account for the figurative, that is imaginary, character of what takes place in the dream.

Obviously, if he already could have used the term imaginary, then it would have removed a large number of the contradictions. But this figurative character is here conceived of as part of the perceptive and the visual is taken by Freud to be equivalent to the perceptual. It is clear that the schema, as constructed in the *Traumdeutung*, necessarily leads to proposing, right at the topographical level, a hypothesis like the following – because the state of dreaming doesn't allow processes to result as normal in motor discharge, there's a backward flow of the process of intentional influx, and its imagistic character makes its appearance. Things can go the other way round – that's what the term regression means, at the point we've got to.

This here is the first formulation with any solidity of this notion which will, in what follows, be accepted, in a similar fashion, on the formal level no less than on the genetic one. The idea of the regression of the individual to the initial stages of his development dominates, as you know, much of our conceptions of the neuroses as well as those of treatment. The entering into play of this notion, which now seems so familiar, is however not a matter of course, as you have realised.

In order to make it easier for you to shift from this schema of the psychic apparatus to that implied by the later development of Freud's thought, namely the one centring on the theory of narcissism, I am going to propose to you a little test.

## 1

The initial dream, the dream of dreams, the inaugurally deciphered dream, is for Freud that of Irma's injection. He gives it as exhaustive an analysis as possible, returning to it very often in the *Traumdeutung* itself, each time he needs a fulcrum, and in particular, at length, when he introduces the notion of condensation.

Well, we are going to take another look at this dream, from our present point of view. We will be within our rights, on condition of our not wanting to make Freud, who is still at the first stage of this thinking, say what is in the last stage, on condition of our not attempting to make these stages agree with one another, according to our own whim.

Under Hartmann's pen you come upon the rather candid admission that, after all, Freud's conceptions aren't quite in agreement amongst themselves, and that they need to be synchronised. The effects of this synchronisation of Freud's thought are precisely what makes the return to the text necessary. In truth, to me it has the tiresome echo of bringing him into line. Not for us the synchronisation of the various stages of Freud's thought, nor even getting them to agree. It is a matter of seeing to what unique and constant difficulty the development of this thought – made of the contradictions of its various stages – responded. Through the succession of antinomies that this thought always presents us with, within each of these stages, and between them, it is a matter of confronting what is properly the object of our experience.

Amongst those people whose function it is to teach analysis and to train analysts, I'm not the only one to have had the idea of taking up the dream of Irma's injection again. That is especially the case with a man called Erikson, who describes himself as an advocate of the culturalist school – for the good it will do him! This so-called culturalism consists in emphasising in analysis those things which, in each case, depend on the cultural context in which the subject is immersed. This aspect has certainly not been ignored up until now – I am not

aware of Freud, nor those who might specifically qualify themselves as Freudians, ever neglecting it. The question is to know whether this element should be given pre-eminent importance in the constitution of the subject. Let us leave to one side for a moment the theoretical discussion which this may raise, and let us see what it leads to.

Apropos of the dream of Irma's injection, it leads to some remarks which I will try to point out to you, as I will have to encounter them in the re-analysis which I will try to conduct today. You will be surprised to see that this culturalism converges quite singularly with a psychologism which consists in understanding the entire analytic text as a function of the various stages in the development of the *ego*. You see that it isn't simply the desire to chaff his synchronisation which led me to mention Hartmann.

The attempt is made, then, to locate the dream of Irma's injection as a stage in the development of Freud's *ego*, an *ego* which has a right to a certain respect, for it is that of a great creator, at a highpoint of his creative capacity. In truth, one cannot say it is a false ideal. Of course there must be a psychology of the creator. But is it the lesson we have to draw from the Freudian experience, and more especially, if we examine it under the microscope, is it the lesson we must draw from what takes place in the dream of Irma's injection?

If this point of view is true, we will have to abandon the notion I tell you to be the essence of the Freudian discovery, the decentring of the subject in relation to the *ego*, and to return to the notion that everything centres on the standard development of the *ego*. That is an alternative without mediation –if that is true, everything I say is false.

Except, if what I say is false, it becomes extremely difficult to read the slightest of Freud's texts and understand anything in it. We shall put it to the test with the dream of Irma's injection.

Why does Freud give such importance to this dream? At first glance, this may be surprising. What, in fact, does Freud extract from the analysis of this dream? This truth, which he posits as primary, that the dream is always the fulfilment of a desire, of a wish [*souhait*].

I will read you the contents of the dream, hoping that this will be enough to bring to mind the analysis which follows it.

*A large hall – many guests, whom we receive. – Among them Irma, whom I immediately take aside, as if to answer her letter, and to reproach her that she doesn't accept the 'solution' yet. I say to her: 'If you still have pains, it is really only your fault.' – She answers: 'If you knew what pains I have now in my throat, stomach and abdomen, it's tightening me up.' – I am startled and look at her. She looks pallid and puffy; I think, after all I am overlooking something organic. I take her to the window and look into her throat. With that she shows some resistance, like women who wear a denture. I think to myself, she doesn't need to do that. – Her mouth then opens properly, and I find on the right a large white spot, and elsewhere I see some remarkable*

*curled structures which evidently are patterned on the nasal turbinal bones, extensive white-grey scabs. — I quickly call Dr M., who repeats and confirms the examination . . . Dr M. looks entirely different from usual; he is very pallid, limps, is beardless on the chin . . . My friend Otto now also stands next to her, and my friend Leopold percusses her over the bodice and says: 'She has a dullness below on the left,' points also to an infiltrated portion of the skin on the left shoulder (which I, in spite of the dress, just as he, feel) . . . M. says: 'Without a doubt, it's an infection, but it doesn't matter; dysentery will follow and the poison will be eliminated . . .' We also directly know where the infection comes from. Recently my friend Otto, when she was not feeling well, gave her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propylene . . . propionic acid . . . trimethylamine (whose formula I see in heavy type before me) . . . one doesn't give such injections so lightly . . . Probably, too, the syringe wasn't clean.<sup>1</sup>*

## 2

Irma is a patient friend of Freud's family. So, with respect to her, he is thus in that delicate situation, always to be avoided, in which the analyst is attending on someone in the circle of his acquaintances. We are much more aware than Freud was, at this pre-historic stage of analysis, of the difficulties, in such a case, of a counter-transference.

That is indeed what happens. Freud has great difficulties with Irma. As he points it out to us in the associations to the dream, he still thinks, at this point in time, that, once the unconscious meaning of the fundamental conflict of the neurosis has been discovered, one only has to put it to the subject, who either accepts or doesn't accept it. If he doesn't accept it, it's his fault, he is a nasty, naughty boy, a bad patient. If he's good, he accepts, and everything is fine and dandy. I'm not pushing anything — there are good and bad patients.

Freud recounts this idea to us with a humour bordering on the rather improvised irony I am indulging in on this subject. He says that he can thank heaven that this was his conception at that time, for it allowed him to make a living.

So, he is in a lot of trouble with Irma, who has certainly improved, but retains certain symptoms, in particular a tendency to vomit. He has just interrupted the treatment, and his friend Otto is bringing him news of his former patient.

In the past, I've underlined that Otto is someone very close to Freud. But he isn't an intimate friend, in the sense of being privy to the ideas of someone who is already a master. He is a good chap, Otto, he does a bit of looking after the

<sup>1</sup> The translation given here follows that of Patrick J. Mahony, 'Towards a formalist approach to dreams', *Int. J. Psa.* 4, 1977, 83–98. Mahony points out that the translation of dreams in SE renders them into the imperfect tense, whereas Freud's text gives them in the present; see GW II/III 112; Stud II 127; SE IV 107. Moreover, Freud makes theoretical remarks concerning the significance of the fact that the tense of all dreams is the present — GW II/III 539–40; Stud II 544–5; SE V 534–5.

entire family, when there are colds about, when things aren't going too well, and his role in the household is that of the friendly, benevolent bachelor, the bringer of gifts. This elicits a certain amused irony in Freud.

The Otto in question, for whom he has genuine, though measured, respect, brings him news of the said Irma, and tells him that, in short, she's alright, but *notas* well as all that. His tone makes Freud think that dear friend Otto somewhat disapproves of him, or more exactly that the latter must have had a share in his circle's gloating, even in the opposition he faced in relation to this cure imprudently undertaken on terrain where he is not as much the master of the manoeuvres as he would like.

Indeed, Freud has the feeling that he has in fact put the right solution to Irma – *Lösung*. This word has the same ambiguity in German as in French – that is as much the solution that one injects as the solution of a conflict. With that, the dream of Irma's injection is already acquiring its symbolic meaning.

At the start, Freud is pretty displeased with his friend. That is because he is even more displeased with himself. He gets to the point of doubting the validity of the solution he's proposed, perhaps even the very principle of his treatment of neuroses.

In this year 1895, he is still at the experimental stage in which he makes his major discoveries, amongst which the analysis of this dream will always seem to him so important that in 1900, in a letter to Fliess, just after the publication of the book in which he relates it, he will entertain himself – though his ways of having fun are never quite inconsequential – by imagining that one day perhaps there will be inscribed, on the threshold of the house in the country at Bellevue where this dream took place – *In this house on July 24th, 1895, the secret of dreams was revealed to Dr Sigmund Freud.*<sup>2</sup>

So, as well as being displeased, Freud at this time is full of confidence. Note it is before the crisis of 1897, a trace of which we find in the letter to Fliess, when he was to think for a moment that the entire trauma theory based on seduction, which was central to the genesis of his conception, had to be rejected, and the whole of his edifice was crumbling away. In 1895 he is in a creative period, as susceptible to certainty as to doubt – which is a feature of the entire development of the discovery.

The disapproval he senses in Otto's voice is the little shock which sets his dream into motion.

Let me point out that as early as 1882, Freud had remarked, in a letter to his fiancée, that it wasn't so much the major preoccupations of the day which made an appearance in dreams, as themes which had been embarked upon and were then interrupted – as when you're cut off.<sup>3</sup> The cutting off of speech struck Freud very early on, and we come upon it again and again in his

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated 12 June 1900, *Origins*, p. 322. <sup>3</sup> Letter dated 30 June 1882.

analyses in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. I have already discussed with you the forgetting of the name of the painter of the Orvieto fresco. What was at issue then was also something which hadn't completely come out during the day.

That, however, is far from being the case here. Freud started work in the evening after dinner, and had written an entire résumé of the Irma case, as a way of putting things straight, and of justifying, if needs be, the general conduct of the treatment.

Then comes the night. With this dream.

I'll go straight to the conclusion. Freud considers it a great success being able to explain this dream in all its detail, by the desire to be relieved of his responsibility for the failure of Irma's treatment. He does so in the dream – as the artisan of the dream – in so many ways that, as he remarks with his customary humour, it bears a great resemblance to the story of the person who, upon being reproached with returning a kettle with a hole in it, answers firstly, that he returned it intact and that secondly, the kettle already had a hole in it when he borrowed it and that thirdly, he hadn't borrowed it. Each of these explanations on its own would be perfectly valid, but taken together can in no way satisfy us.

That's how this dream is conceived, Freud tells us. And, of course, we find there the thread of everything which appears in the dream. But the question in my view is rather more like this – how is it that Freud, who later on will develop the function of unconscious desire, is here content, for the first step in his demonstration, to present a dream which is entirely explained by the satisfaction of a desire which one cannot but call preconscious, and even entirely conscious? Didn't Freud spend the previous evening trying to put down in black and white a justification as much of what works as what doesn't?

To establish this formula, that in every case the dream is the satisfaction of a desire, Freud doesn't seem, on first impression, to have required anything more than the most general notion of desire, nor to have been much preoccupied with knowing what this desire is, nor from whence it comes – from the unconscious or the preconscious.

Freud then raises the question in the note which I read out to you last time – what is it, this unconscious desire? What is it, this thing which is pushed away and horrifies the subject? What does it mean to speak of an unconscious desire? For whom does this desire exist?

This is the level where we'll find clarification of the immense satisfaction which the solution Freud gives of the dream brings him. To gain for ourselves a full sense of the fact that this dream plays a decisive role in Freud's account, we must take into account the importance which Freud grants it, all the more significant for seeming paradoxical to us. At first sight, one might say that the decisive step hasn't been taken, since in the end it is only a preconscious desire

which emerges. But if he maintains that this dream is the dream of dreams, the initial, typical dream, it is because he has the feeling of having taken it, this step, and the account which follows shows only too well that he has indeed taken it. If he has the feeling that he has taken it, it's because he has.

I am not redoing the analysis of Freud's dream after Freud himself. That would be absurd. Just as it is out of the question to analyse dead authors, so it is out of the question to analyse his own dream better than Freud. Freud has his reasons for breaking off the associations. He tells us – *At this point, I can't tell you any more than this, I don't want to tell stories of bed and chamber pot – or else – Here I no longer feel inclined to continue to associate.* It is not a matter of carrying out an exegesis where Freud interrupts himself but for us to take the whole of the dream and its interpretation. That's where we are in a different position from that of Freud.

There are two operations – having the dream, and interpreting it. Interpreting is an operation in which we intervene. But don't forget that in the majority of cases, we also intervene in the first. In an analysis, we intervene not only in that we interpret the dream of the subject – if indeed we do interpret it – but, on account of our already being, as analyst, in the life of the subject, we are already in his dream.

Remember, in this society's inaugural lecture, what I talked to you about apropos of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. I was using these categories in the form of small and capital letters.

iS – imagining the symbol, putting the symbolic discourse into a figurative form, namely the dream.

SI – symbolising the image, making a dream-interpretation.

Except, for that there has to be a reversion, the symbol has to be symbolised. In between, there's room for understanding what happens in this double transformation. That is what we are going to try to do – take this dream and the interpretation which Freud gives of it as a whole, and see what it signifies in the symbolic and the imaginary order.

We are lucky that this famous dream, which, as will be only too obvious to you, we'll be treating with the greatest respect, isn't, because it is a dream, in time. It is very easy to observe, and it constitutes precisely the originality of dreams – the dream is not in time.

There is something absolutely striking – none of the authors in question draws attention to this fact, in its purity. Erikson comes close to it, but unfortunately, his culturalism isn't a very useful tool for him. This culturalism obliges him to raise the so-called problem of the study of the manifest content of the dream. The dream's manifest content, he tells us, deserves to be placed once again the foreground. On this point, there follows a very confused discussion, based on this opposition between the superficial and the profound, which I beg

you to rid yourselves of. As Gide says in *The Counterfeiters*, there is nothing more profound than the superficial, because there isn't anything profound. But that's besides the point.

You must start from the text, start by treating it, as Freud does and as he recommends, as Holy Writ. The author, the scribe, is only a pen-pushers, and he comes second. The commentaries on the Scriptures were irremediably lost the day when people wanted to get at the psychology of Jeremiah, of Isaiah, of even Jesus Christ. Similarly, when it comes to our patients, please give more attention to the text than to the psychology of the author – the entire orientation of my teaching is that.

Take this text. M. Erikson attaches great importance to the fact that at the beginning, Freud says – *we are receiving*. Thus, he would seem to have a dual personality – he entertains with his wife. It is a small, awaited, birthday party, at which Irma, the friend of the family, is expected. I'm quite happy, in fact, that the *we are receiving* introduces Freud in his identity as head of the family, but that doesn't seem to me to imply a very great duplicity in social function, because *Frau Doktor* makes no appearance at all, not for one minute.

As soon as Freud enters into dialogue, the visual field shrinks. He takes Irma aside and starts reproaching her, inveighing against her – *It is really all your fault, if you would listen to me it would get better*. Inversely, Irma tells him – *You don't know how much it hurts here and here, and there, in the throat, belly, stomach*. And then she says that it *zusammenschnüren*, that it chokes her.\* This *zusammenschnüren* seems vividly expressive to me.

MME X: *In the old days, three or four people were needed to pull on the laces of a corset to tighten it.*

Freud is then quite impressed, and begins to show disquiet. He draws her towards the window and makes her open her mouth.

So all this takes place against a background of discussion and of resistance – resistance not only to what Freud suggests, but also to the examination.

In fact the resistance we have here is the feminine type of resistance. Authors skate over this by talking about so-called Victorian feminine psychology. Because it is well known that women no longer resist us – it doesn't excite us any more, women who resist, and when you come upon feminine resistance, these poor Victorian women are always there to take all the blame. It's quite funny. A consequence of the culturalism which here doesn't succeed in opening Erikson's eyes.

Nonetheless, Freud's associations revolve around this resistance. They emphasise the fact that Irma is far from being the only one implicated although only she appears in the dream. Amongst the people who are *etwas Sträuben*,

\* SE gives 'chokes'; Mahony gives 'tightening up'; the French term is 'étouffe'.

there are two in particular who, despite being symmetrical, are nonetheless somewhat problematic – Freud's own wife, who we know from other sources is pregnant at the time, and another woman patient.

We know the immense importance of the role which his wife played in Freud's life. He had not only a familial attachment to her, but also a conjugal, highly idealised one. It does seem, nonetheless, given certain nuances, that on certain levels, she brought him a certain disappointment. As for the patient, she is so to speak the ideal patient, because she isn't Freud's patient, she is quite pretty, and certainly cleverer than Irma, whose capacity for understanding tends to be denigrated. She also has the added attraction of not asking for Freud's help, which allows him to hope that she might one day ask him for it. But to tell the truth he doesn't entertain high hopes of it. In short, the thematic register in which woman appears here and within which the relation to Irma is located extends from the purest professional interest to all the forms of imaginary mirage.

In the dream itself, Freud shows himself as he is, and his *ego* is completely at home on the level of his vigilant *ego*. As psychotherapist, he openly discusses Irma's symptoms, which no doubt are a little, but only slightly, modified compared with what they are in reality. Irma herself is hardly distorted. What she has to show, she would show just the same if one were to look at it closely in the waking state. If Freud analysed his behaviour, his responses, his emotions, his transference at every moment in the dialogue with Irma, he would see just as easily that behind Irma is his wife, her intimate friend, and just as easily the seductive young woman who is just a few steps away and who would make a far better patient than Irma.

This is at the first level, where the dialogue remains subjected to the conditions of the real relation, in so far as it is itself totally stuck within the imaginary conditions which limit it, and which for the moment present Freud with difficulties.

That goes very far. Having got the patient to open her mouth – that is precisely what's at stake in reality, that she doesn't open her mouth – what he sees in there, these turbinate bones covered with a whitish membrane, is a horrendous sight. This mouth has all the equivalences in terms of significations, all the condensations you want. Everything blends in and becomes associated in this image, from the mouth to the female sexual organ, by way of the nose – just before or just after this, Freud has his turbinate bones operated on, by Fliess or by someone else. There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands *par excellence*, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as its form in itself is something which provokes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety, identification of anxiety, the final

revelation of *you are this* – *You are this, which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness*. Freud comes upon a revelation of the type, *Mene, Tekel, Peres* at the height of his need to see, to know, which was until then expressed in the dialogue of the *ego* with the object.

Here, Erikson makes an observation which, I must admit, is excellent – normally a dream which leads to that should cause one to awaken. Why doesn't Freud wake up? Because he's a tough customer.

I've got nothing against that – he is a tough customer. So, Erikson adds, as his *ego* is disagreeably stuck in front of this spectacle, this *ego* regresses – the rest of the account is there to tell us that. Erikson then sets up an entire theory of the different stages of the *ego*, with which I will acquaint you. These psychological diversions are certainly extremely instructive, but to me they seem in truth to go against the very spirit of Freudian theory. For, in the end, if the *ego* is this succession of emergences, of shapes, if this double face of good and evil, of realisations and of modes of derealisations constitute its type, one fails to see what can be made of the fact Freud states in a thousand, two thousand different places in his writings, namely that the *ego* is the sum of the identifications of the subject, with all that that implies as to its radical contingency. If you allow me to give an image of it, the *ego* is like the superimposition of various coats borrowed from what I would call the bric-à-brac of its props department.

Can you really, you analysts, in all honesty, bring me testimonies of these splendid typical developments of the *ego* of subjects? These are tall stories. We are told how this great tree, man, has such a sumptuous development, how throughout his existence he overcomes successive trials, thanks to which he achieves a miraculous equilibrium. A human life is something entirely different! I have already written that in the past, in my lecture on psychogenesis.

### 3

Is it really a question of the regression of the *ego* at the moment when Freud avoids waking up? What we see is that, from this point on, it's no longer a question of Freud. He calls professor M. to his aid because he can't make head or tail of it. This won't get him a better one, a better head or tail.<sup>5</sup>

Doctor M., the circle's dominant figure, as he calls him – I haven't identified who it is – is an entirely respectable character in the everyday life of practice. He has certainly never done Freud a great deal of harm, but he doesn't always agree with him, and Freud isn't the sort of man to accept that easily.

There's also Otto and his chum Leopold, who goes one better than his chum Otto. This gives him considerable merit in Freud's eyes, and he compares the

<sup>5</sup> The untranslatable pun in French is between '*perdre son latin*' ('no longer understand anything') and '*en donner un meilleur, de latin*' (roughly, 'be given a better one, of Latin').

two of them to Inspector Bräsig and his friend Karl. Inspector Bräsig is a sly one, but he's always wrong, because he fails to take a close look at things. His chum Karl, always at his side, notices them, and all the inspector has to do is follow him.

With this trio of clowns, we see a rambling dialogue built up around little Irma, closer in fact to a game of interrupted conversations, and even to the well-known dialogue of the deaf.

All this is extremely rich and I am just summarising. Then the associations which show us the real meaning of the dream appear. Freud realises that he ends up entirely without blame, according to the logic of the kettle with a hole in it. The three of them are so ridiculous that anyone would seem like a god besides such absurd automata. All these characters are significant, in that each of them is the site of an identification whereby the *ego* is formed.

Dr M. corresponds to a function which was of capital importance to Freud, that of his half-brother, Philippe, who, as I've told you in another context, was the essential character for the understanding of Freud's Oedipus complex. If Freud's induction into the Oedipus complex was decisive for the history of humanity, it is obviously because he had a father who already had two sons from a first marriage, Emmanuel and Philippe, of similar age, with about three years difference, but who were already old enough for each of them to have been the father of the little Freud, Sigmund, who was born to a mother exactly the same age as this Emmanuel. This Emmanuel was for Freud the object of horror *par excellence*. It was even believed that all the horrors were concentrated on him – erroneously, for Philippe had his share in them. It was him who shopped Freud's dear old nanny, who has been accorded a disproportionate importance, by culturalists wanting to annex Freud to Catholicism with her as intermediary.

It nonetheless remains the case that the members of the intermediate generation played a considerable role. It is a superior form allowing the concentration of aggressive attacks against the father without touching the symbolic father too much, who, as for him, is to be found in a heaven which, without being that of sainthood, is nonetheless extremely important for all that. The symbolic father remains intact thanks to this division of functions.

Dr M. represents the ideal character constituted by the paternal pseudo-image, the imaginary father. Otto corresponds to the character who played a perennial role in Freud's life, the intimate, close friend who is both friend and enemy, who from one hour to the next changes from being a friend to being an enemy. And Leopold plays the role of the character who is always useful to counter the character of the friend-enemy, of the beloved enemy.

Here, then, is an entirely different triad from the preceding one, but which is just as much in the dream. Freud's interpretation allows us to understand its meaning. But what is its role in the dream? It plays with speech, with decisive and adjudicating speech, with the law, with what torments Freud under the

form – *Am I right or wrong? Where is the truth? What is the outcome of the problem? Where am I placed?*

The first time around, accompanying Irma's *ego* we've found three feminine characters. Freud remarks that there is such a profusion of intercalations at this point that in the end things are knotted together and one ends up confronted with some unknown mystery.

When we analyse this text, we must take into account the text in its entirety, including the notes. This is when Freud indicates that point in the associations where the dream is connected up to the unknown, which he calls its navel.

We've arrived at whatever it is that lies behind the mystic trio. I say *mystic* because we now know its meaning. The three women, the three sisters, the three caskets, Freud has since shown us its meaning. The last term is death, as simple as that.<sup>6</sup>

That in fact is what it is all about. We can even see it coming to the surface in the middle of the hubbub of speech in the second part. The story of the diphtheric membrane is directly tied to the threat, of real significance, to the life of one of Freud's daughters two years previously. Freud had taken it to be a punishment for a therapeutic blunder he'd committed when he'd given one of his patients an excessive dose of a drug, sulphonal, unaware that its habitual usage might have harmful side-effects. He thought he was thereby paying the price for his professional mistake.

In the second part, the three characters together play a ridiculous game of passing the buck with regard to these fundamental questions for Freud – *What is the meaning of the neurosis? What is the meaning of the cure? How well-founded is my therapy for neurosis?* And behind all this, there is the Freud who dreams whilst being a Freud who seeks the key to the dream. That is why the key to the dream is the same thing as the key to neurosis and the key to the cure.

Just as there's a highpoint in the first stage, when the apocalyptic revelation of what was there takes place, so there's also a peak in the second part. At first, directly [*immédiatement*], *unmittelbar*, just as in a delirious conviction when all of a sudden you know that it is him who's got something against you, they know that Otto's the culprit. He'd given an injection. The search is on – . . . *propyl . . . propylene . . .* With this is associated the very funny story of the pineapple juice<sup>7</sup> which Otto had given the family the day before. When opened, its smell of cheap spirits. It was suggested – *Let's give it to the servants.* But Freud, *more humane*,<sup>8</sup> so he says, gently remarks: – *No, it might poison them as well.*<sup>9</sup>

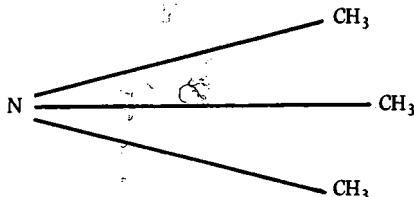
<sup>6</sup> Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' (1913) GW X 24–37: Stud X 183–93; SE XII 291–301.

<sup>7</sup> 'Likör' in German text; 'jus' in French text.

<sup>8</sup> 'menschengnädlichen' in German; translated in SE as 'philanthropic'.

<sup>9</sup> A compromise between Lacan's French rendition ('*Mais non, eux aussi, ça pourrait leur faire du mal.*') and the German ('*sie sollen sich auch nicht vergiften.*'), well caught, in idiomatic English, in SE: 'there was no need for them to be poisoned either.' – SE IV 116.

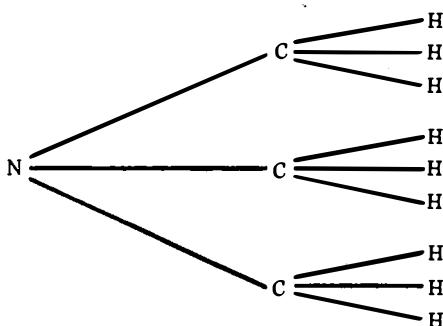
What emerges, printed in heavy type, beyond the hubbub of speech, like the *Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* of the Bible, is the formula for trimethylamine. I will write this formula out for you.



This explains everything, *trimethylamine*. The dream does not only owe its meaning to Freud's research on the meaning of dreams. If he can continue to ask himself the question, it is because he asks himself if all this communicates with Fliess, in whose elucidations trimethylamine plays a role in connection with the decomposition products of sexual substances. Indeed – I've made inquiries – trimethylamine is a decomposition product of sperm, and it gives it its ammoniacal smell when it's left to decompose in the air. The dream, which culminated a first time, when the *ego* was there, with the horrific image I mentioned, culminates a second time at the end with a formula, with its *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* aspect, on the wall, beyond what we cannot but identify as speech, universal rumour.

Like my oracle, the formula gives no reply whatsoever to anything. But the very manner in which it is spelt out, its enigmatic, hermetic nature, is in fact the answer to the question of the meaning of the dream. One can model it closely on the Islamic formula – *There is no other God but God*. There is no other word, no other solution to your problem, than the word.

We can rely on the structure of this word, which here makes its appearance in an eminently symbolic form, since it is given in sacred signs.



These threes which we keep encountering, again and again, that's where, in the dream, the unconscious is – what is outside all of the subjects. The structure of the dream shows us clearly enough that the unconscious is not the *ego* of the dreamer, that it isn't Freud in the guise of Freud pursuing his conversation with Irma. It is a Freud who has come through this moment of great anxiety when his ego was identified with the whole in its most unconstituted form. Quite literally, he escaped, he called upon, as he himself wrote, the congress of all those who know. He fainted, was reabsorbed, was abolished behind them. And finally another voice is heard. One can play around with the alpha and omega of the thing. But even if we had N instead of AZ it would be the same nonsense – we could give the name *Nemo* to this subject outside the subject who designates the whole structure of the dream.<sup>10</sup>

So this dream teaches us the following – what is at stake in the function of the dream is beyond the *ego*, what in the subject is of the subject and not of the subject, that is the unconscious.

What does it matter to us at this point if Otto gave an injection with a dirty syringe? You can have a lot of fun with this syringe with all its everyday usages, which in German have all sorts of resonances which in French are given by the verb *gicler* [to spirt]. We are sufficiently familiar, on account of all kinds of small clues, with the importance of urethral eroticism in Freud's life. One day when I am in a good mood, I'll show you that, until he was quite old, there was something in Freud in this area which clearly echoes the memory of his urinating in his parents' bedroom – to which Erikson attaches such importance. He tells us that there must have been a small chamber pot and that he can't have peed on the floor. Freud doesn't specify if he did it in the maternal chamber pot or on the carpet or the floorboards. But that is of secondary importance.

The important thing, and this dream shows us it, is that analytic symptoms are produced in the flow of a word which tries to get through. It always encounters the double resistance of what we will call just for today, because it is late, the *ego* of the subject and its image. So long as these two interpositions offer a sufficient resistance, they clarify each other, if I may put it like that, within this flow, they are phosphorescent, they flash.

That's what happens in the first phases of the dream, throughout which Freud is on the plane of resistance, playing with his patient. At a certain point in time, because it must have gone pretty far, it stops. He isn't completely wrong, Erikson, it really is because Freud was prey to such a passion for knowing that he carries on regardless.

What gives this dream its veritable unconscious value, whatever its

<sup>10</sup> The last two sentences rely on the symbol for nitrogen in French chemical nomenclature being 'AZ' from 'azote' (from the Greek, 'a-', 'without' and 'zōē', 'life'); hence the reference to alpha and omega. '*Nemo*' is Greek for 'no one'.

primordial and infantile echoes, is the quest for the word, the direct confrontation with the secret reality of the dream, the quest for signification as such. In the midst of all his colleagues, of this consensus of the republic of those who know – for if no one is right, every one is right, a law which is simultaneously paradoxical and reassuring – in the midst of this chaos, in this original moment when his doctrine is born into the world, the meaning of the dream is revealed to Freud – that there is no other word of the dream than the very nature of the symbolic.

The nature of the symbolic, I myself also want to introduce you into it by telling you, to serve you as a marker – symbols only ever have the value of symbols.

A traversal is accomplished. After the first part, the most loaded, imaginary part, something comes into the dream at the end which we could call *the crowd*. But it is a structured crowd, like the Freudian crowd. That is why I would prefer to introduce another term, which I will leave to your reflection with all the double meanings it contains – the inmixing [immixtion] of subjects.

The subject enters and mixes in with things – that may be the first meaning. The other one is this – an unconscious phenomenon which takes place on the symbolic level, as such decentred in relation to the *ego*, always takes place between two subjects. As soon as true speech emerges, mediating, it turns them into two very different subjects from what they were prior to speech. This means that they only start being constituted as subjects of speech once speech exists, and there is no before.

9 March 1955

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## The dream of Irma's injection (conclusion)

THE IMAGINARY, THE REAL AND THE SYMBOLIC

What did you get out of M. Griaule's lecture yesterday evening?<sup>1</sup> In what way does it relate to our customary objects? Who has had time to distil its moral? What are your impressions?

Marcel Griaule made a rapid allusion to the Islamisation of an important segment of the populations of the Sudan, to the fact that the latter continue to function with a symbolic register while belonging to a style of religious credo clearly dissonant with this system. Their demand on this level is manifested in a very precise manner, for instance when they ask to be taught Arabic, because Arabic is the language of the Koran. That's a tradition which goes a long way back, is very much alive, and appears to have all manner of means for keeping itself afloat. Unfortunately, he left us hanging in mid-air.

You mustn't get the impression that Sudanese civilisation doesn't deserve its name. We have sufficient evidence of its creations and of its metaphysics to put into question the single scale by which we think we can gauge the quality of civilisations.

Who has read Lévi-Strauss's most recent article? That is what he is alluding to – certain errors in our ways of looking at things stem from the fact that we use a single scale to gauge the quality, the exceptional character, of a civilisation. The conditions in which these people live may at first sight seem rather harsh, rather precarious from the point of view of comfort and of civilisation, but they seem nonetheless to receive very powerful support in the symbolic function, isolated as such.

It has taken a long time for us to be capable of entering into communication with them. There's an analogy here with our position *vis-à-vis* the subject.

<sup>1</sup> Marcel Griaule (1898–1956), ethnologist of Central African societies; author of *Les Masques des Dogons*, Paris, 1938. On 15 March 1955 he gave a lecture to the Société Française de Psychanalyse entitled 'Symbolisation of the world and the conditions for communication in the Sudanese'.

## 2

Let us come back to the dream of Irma's injection.

I would like to know whether what I told you was clearly understood. What was I trying to say? Who wants to speak?

Well, I think I highlighted the dramatic character of Freud's discovery of the meaning of dreams between 1895 and 1900, that is during the years when he is assembling his *Traumdeutung*. When I speak of the dramatic character, I would like, in support, to show you a passage from a letter to Fliess which follows the famous letter 137 in which, half-jokingly, half-seriously, but really terribly seriously, he suggests that this dream will be commemorated by a plaque – *In this house on July 24th, 1895, the Secret of Dreams was revealed to Dr Sigmund Freud*.

In letter 138, one reads – *The big problems are still unsettled. It is an intellectual hell, layer upon layer of it, with everything fitfully gleaming and pulsating; and the outline of Lucifer-Amor coming into sight at the darkest centre.*<sup>2</sup> It is an image of waves, of oscillations, as if the entire world were animated by a disquieting imaginary pulsation, and at the same time an image of fire, in which appears the silhouette of Lucifer, who seems to embody the anxiety-ridden dimension of Freud's experience. That is how he lived his forties, at the decisive moment when the discovery of the function of the unconscious was made.

The experience of the fundamental discovery was, for Freud, living through the putting into question of the very foundations of the world. We don't need any further indications concerning his self-analysis, in as much as he alludes to it rather than reveals anything about it in the letters to Fliess. He lives in an atmosphere of anxiety with the feeling that he's making a dangerous discovery.

The very meaning of the dream of Irma's injection is related to the depth of this experience. This dream is part of it, it is one of its stages. The dream Freud had is, as a dream, integrated in the progress of his discovery. That is how it acquires its double meaning. At the second level, this dream is not only an object which Freud deciphers, it is Freud's speech. That is what gives it its exemplary value – otherwise, it might perhaps be less demonstrative than other dreams. The value Freud accords it, as the dream whose deciphering was inaugural, would remain quite enigmatic if we didn't know how to read how it was that it specifically answered the question which confronted him, which, in short, went far beyond what Freud himself is at this point in time capable of analysing for us in what he writes.

What he weighs up, the balance-sheet he draws up of the significance of the dream, is far surpassed by the *de facto* historical value he grants it by placing it in this position in his *Traumdeutung*. That is essential to the understanding of this dream. And that is what enables us – I wanted your reply to bring

<sup>2</sup> Freud, *Origins*, p. 323.

confirmation of this, and I don't know how to interpret your silence – to give a convincing enough demonstration, I think, for me not to have to return to it again.

I will, nonetheless, return to it, but at another level.

I want to emphasise, in fact, how I didn't just limit myself to considering the dream itself in going over the interpretation Freud gives of it, but how I considered the whole constituted by the dream and his interpretation and how I did this by taking into account the specific function of the dream's interpretation in Freud's dialogue with us.

That is the essential point – we cannot separate off from the interpretation the fact that Freud makes of this dream our first step towards the key to the dream. It is us Freud is addressing when making this interpretation.

Careful examination of this dream can throw light on the very thorny question of regression, which is what we had got to in the penultimate seminar.

We are using it in a more and more routine manner, while not being oblivious to the fact that we are superimposing extremely different functions at every turn. Not everything, in regression, necessarily belongs to the same register, as this original chapter already indicates in relation to the topographical distinction, which is certainly sustained by temporal regression and formal regressions. On the level of topographical regression, the hallucinatory nature of the dream led Freud, in accordance with his schema, to articulate it with a regredient process, to the extent that it would bring back certain psychic requirements to their most primitive mode of expression, which would be situated at the level of perception. The dream's mode of expression would thus find itself subjected in part to the requirements of passing via figurative elements which would come closer and closer to the level of perception. But should a process which usually passes along the progradient line lead to these mnemonic limitations, which are those of images? These images are further and further away from the qualitative level on which perception occurs, more and more denuded, they take on a more and more associative character, they belong more and more in the symbolic knot of resemblance, of identity and of difference, so beyond what properly speaking belongs to the associationist level.

Does our analysis of what is strictly figurative in the dream of Irma impose such an interpretation on us? Do we have to consider that what happens at the associative levels *Mnem.*, *Mnem.'*, *Mnem. ''*, etc... brings us back more closely to the primitive point of entry of perception? Is this something which obliges us to adopt this schema, with all that that entails – as Valabrega pointed out – in the way of paradox? When we speak of unconscious processes coming into consciousness, we are indeed obliged to place consciousness at the exit, whereas perception, with which it is in fact closely bound up, is to be found at the entrance.

The phenomenology of the dream of Irma's injection led us to distinguish

two parts. The first leads to the apparition of the terrifying anxiety-provoking image, to this real Medusa's head, to the revelation of this something which properly speaking is unnameable, the back of this throat, the complex, unlocatable form, which also makes it into the primitive object *par excellence*, the abyss of the feminine organ from which all life emerges, this gulf of the mouth, in which everything is swallowed up, and no less the image of death in which everything comes to its end, since in relation to the illness of his daughter, which could have been fatal, there's the death of the patient whom he had lost at a time adjacent to that of the illness of his daughter, which he considered to be some mysterious sort of divine retribution for his professional negligence – *this Mathilde for that Mathilde*, he writes. Hence there's an anxiety-provoking apparition of an image which summarises what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence*.

In the first phase, then, we see Freud in his chase after Irma, reproaching her for not understanding what he wants to get her to understand. He was carrying on his relationships in exactly the same style as he did in real life, in the style of the passionate quest, too passionate we would say, and it is indeed one of the meanings of the dream to say that formally, since at the end that is what it comes down to – the syringe was dirty, the passion of the analyst, the ambition to succeed, were here too pressing, the counter-transference was itself the obstacle.

When the dream reaches its first peak, what happens? Can we speak of a process of regression in order to explain the fundamental destructuration which then occurs in the experience of the dreamer? The relations of the subject change completely. He becomes something totally different, there's no Freud any longer, there is no longer anyone who can say *I*. This is the moment I've called the entry of the fool, since that is more or less the role played by the subjects on whom Freud calls. It's in the text – *appelliere*.<sup>3</sup> The Latin root of the word indicates the juridical meaning it has on this occasion – Freud appeals to the consensus of his fellow-beings, of his equals, of his colleagues, of his superiors. A decisive point.

So can we here speak, without further ado, of regression, even of the regression of the *ego*? It is in any event a very different notion from that of instinctual regression. The notion of the regression of the *ego* was introduced by Freud in the lectures grouped together under the title *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*.<sup>4</sup> It raises the question as to whether we can introduce without

<sup>3</sup> The phrase in the original is 'ich appelliere von ihm weg an einen anderen, Besserwissenden' – GW II/III 124; Stud II 138; SE IV 119.

<sup>4</sup> Known in French as *Introduction à la Psychanalyse*, the title Lacan quotes.

any further ado the notion of typical stages of the *ego*, with a development, phases, a normative progress.

The question will not be resolved today, but you are familiar with a work which should be considered as essential to this subject, that of Anna Freud on *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*. It has to be recognised that, in the present state of affairs, we can in no way introduce the notion of a typical, stylised development of the ego. This would require a defence mechanism whose very nature would indicate to us whether a symptom is attached to it, at what stage it figures in the psychic development of an ego. Regarding this, there is nothing which can be tabulated – as has been done, and perhaps overdone, for the development of instinctual relations. We are quite incapable, at this moment, of putting the different defence mechanisms which Anna Freud enumerates for us into a genetic schema with any resemblance, however slight, to that which can be drawn up for the development of instinctual relations.

This is what many authors try to provide. Erikson doesn't fail to do so. And yet, do we have to have recourse to that in order to understand this turning point in the dream, the shift from one phase to another? We're not dealing with an antecedent state of the ego, but, literally, with a spectral decomposition of the function of the ego. We can see the series of egos appear. Because the ego is made up of the series of identifications which represented an essential landmark for the subject, at each historical moment in his life, in a manner dependent on circumstances – you will find that in *Das Ich und das Es*, which follows *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the pivotal point we are in the process of rejoining after having taken this grand detour via the early stages of Freud's thinking.

This spectral decomposition is evidently an imaginary decomposition. It is on this that I would now like to focus your attention.

## 2

Following the *Traumdeutung*, Freud's thought reaches that stage which, correlatively with the *Papers on Technique* which we studied last year, is marked by the development of the theory of narcissism in the article *Zur Einführung des Narzissmus*, which we haven't been able to avoid referring to.

If Freud's theory, in which narcissism structures all of man's relations with the external world, has a meaning, if we have to draw its logical consequences, it does so in a manner which clearly is in harmony with everything which the so-called *Gestaltist* line of enquiry has given us in the course of the last few years concerning the development of the apprehension of the world by the living organism.

The structuring of the animal world is dominated by a certain number of fundamental images which give this world its lines of *force majeure*. It all

happens so differently in man's world, whose structuration is seemingly highly neutralised, exceptionally loose in relation to his needs. Well then, the Freudian notion of narcissism gives us a category which enables us to understand to what extent there is nonetheless a relation between the structuration of the animal world and that of the human world.

What did I try to get across with the mirror stage? That whatever in man is loosened up, fragmented, anarchic, establishes its relation to his perceptions on a plane with a completely original tension. The image of his body is the principle of every unity he perceives in objects. Now, he only perceives the unity of this specific image from the outside, and in an anticipated manner. Because of this double relation which he has with himself, all the objects of his world are always structured around the wandering shadow of his own ego. They will all have a fundamentally anthropomorphic character, even egomorphic we could say. Man's ideal unity, which is never attained as such and escapes him at every moment, is evoked at every moment in this perception. The object is never for him definitively the final object, except in exceptional experiences. But it thus appears in the guise of an object from which man is irremediably separated, and which shows him the very figure of his dehiscence within the world – object which by essence destroys him, anxiety, which he cannot recapture, in which he will never truly be able to find reconciliation, his adhesion to the world, his perfect complementarity on the level of desire. It is in the nature of desire to be radically torn. The very image of man brings in here a mediation which is always imaginary, always problematic, and which is therefore never completely fulfilled. It is maintained by a succession of momentary experiences, and this experience either alienates man from himself, or else ends in a destruction, a negation of the object.

If the object perceived from without has its own identity, the latter places the man who sees it in a state of tension, because he perceives himself as desire, and as unsatisfied desire. Inversely, when he grasps his unity, on the contrary it is the world which for him becomes decomposed, loses its meaning, and takes on an alienated and discordant aspect. It is this imaginary oscillation which gives to all human perception the dramatic subjacency experienced by a subject, in so far as his interest is truly aroused.

So we do not have to look to regression for the reason why it is imaginary apparitions [*surgissements*] which are characteristic of the dream. To the extent that a dream may get to the point of entering the order of anxiety, and that a drawing nigh of the ultimate real is experienced, we find ourselves present at this imaginary decomposition which is only the revelation of the normal component parts of perception. For perception is a total relation to a given picture, in which man always recognises himself somewhere, and sometimes even sees himself in several places. If the picture of the relation to the world is not made unreal by the subject, it is because it contains elements representing

the diversified images of his ego, and these are so many points of anchorage, of stabilisation, of inertia. That is exactly how I teach you to interpret dreams in supervisions – the main thing is to recognise where the ego of the subject is.

That's what we find already in the *Traumdeutung*, where Freud recognises on so many occasions that it is he, Freud, who is represented by this or that person. For instance, when he analyses the dream of the castle, of the Spanish-American war, in the chapter which we have begun to study, Freud says – *I'm not in the dream where one might think. The character who just died, this commandant who is with me, it is he who is I.*<sup>5</sup> At the moment when something of the real, something at its most unfathomable, is attained, the second part of the dream of Irma's injection highlights these fundamental components of the perceptual world constituting the narcissistic relation. The object is always more or less structured as the image of the body of the subject. The reflection of the subject, its mirror image, is always found somewhere in every perceptual picture, and that is what gives it a quality, a special inertia. This image is masked, sometimes even entirely so. But in the dream, because of an alleviation of the imaginary relations, it is easily revealed at every moment, all the more so to the extent that the point of anxiety where the subject encounters the experience of his being torn apart, of his isolation in relation to the world has been attained. There is something originally, inaugurally, profoundly wounded in the human relation to the world.

That is what comes out of the theory of narcissism Freud gave us, in so far as this framework introduces an indefinable, a *no exit*, marking all relations, and especially the libidinal relations of the subject. *Verliebtheit* is fundamentally narcissistic. On the libidinal level, the object is only ever apprehended through the grid of the narcissistic relation.

That happens when we see the subject substituted for by the polycephalic subject – this crowd I was speaking about last time, a crowd in the Freudian sense, the one discussed in *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, made up of the imaginary plurality of the subject, of the fanning out, the blossoming of the different identifications of the *ego*. At first this seems to us like an abolition, a destruction of the subject as such. The subject transformed into this polycephalic image seems to be somewhat acephalic. If there is an image which could represent for us the Freudian notion of the unconscious, it is indeed that of the acephalic subject, of a subject who no longer has an *ego*, who doesn't belong to the *ego*. And yet he is the subject who speaks, for that's who gives all the characters in the dream their nonsensical lines – which precisely derive their meaning from their nonsensical character.

In fact, just when the discourse of the multiple *ego* makes itself heard in a

<sup>5</sup> GW II/III 466–70; Stud II 447–50; SE V 463–7. It is referred to again in chapter VII, GW II/III 553; Stud II 523; SE V 547, but the passage Lacan is paraphrasing is on p. 467/448/464.

great cacophony, the objection which interests Freud is his own guilt, on this occasion towards Irma. The object is destroyed, if I can put it like this, and his guilt, which is what is in question, is destroyed with it. As in the story of the kettle with a hole in it, there is no crime here, since *firstly*, the victim was – which the dream says in a thousand different ways – already dead, that is to say was already ill with an organic ailment which is precisely what Freud could not cure, *secondly*, the murderer, Freud, was innocent of any intention to harm, and *thirdly*, the crime in question was curative, for the illness, which was dysentery – there is a play on words between dysentery and diphtheria – is precisely what will relieve the patient – all the pain, the bad moods, will leave with it.

In Freud's associations, this chimes in with a ludicrous incident he'd heard of in the days preceding his dream. A doctor, with a cutting and oracular tongue, at the same time profoundly absent-minded – doctors have throughout history retained this air of being characters in a comedy when they carry out their function of consultant – a doctor gives his opinion on a case in which it has been pointed out to him that the subject has albumen in his urine. To which he retorts – *No matter, the albumen will be eliminated.*

That, in fact, is what the dream leads up to. The coming into operation of the symbolic function in its most radical, absolute, usage ends up abolishing the action of the individual so completely that by the same token it eliminates his tragic relation to the world. The paradoxical and absurd equivalent of *Everything real is rational.*

The strictly philosophical contemplation of the world can indeed place us in a sort of ataraxia in which any individual is justified by the motives which make him act, and which are conceived as totally determining him. Any action, being the cunning of reason, is equally valid. The extreme use of the radically symbolic character of all truth thus makes it lose the sharp edge of its relation to the truth. At the heart of the flow of events, of the functioning of reason, the subject from the first move finds himself to be no more than a pawn, forced inside this system, and excluded from any truly dramatic, and consequently tragic, participation in the realisation of truth.

This is something extreme, which takes place at the outer edge of the dream. Freud recognises the secret animation of this dream in this procedure dedicated to excusing, the aim pursued by what he calls the structuring desire. This leads us to address the question as to the joint between the imaginary and the symbolic.

relation, I drew upon the most recent experiments in cybernetics. I supposed that a certain number of these artificial subjects were captivated by the image of their fellow-being. So that this system doesn't amount to being a more and more paralysing, vast concentric hallucination, so that it works, the intervention of a regulatory third party was necessary, which would put this distance, the distance of a certain prescribed order, between them.

Well, approaching from a different angle, we come upon the same thing again – every imaginary relation comes about via a kind of *you or me* between the subject and the object. That is to say – *If it's you, I'm not. If it's me, it's you who isn't*. That's where the symbolic element comes into play. On the imaginary level, the objects only ever appear to man within relations which fade. He recognises his unity in them, but uniquely from without. And in as much he recognises his unity in an object, he feels himself to be in disarray in relation to the latter.

This disarray, this fragmentedness, this fundamental discordance, this essential lack of adaptation, this anarchy, which opens up every possibility of displacement, that is of error, is characteristic of the instinctual life of man – the very experience of analysis shows us that. What is more, if the object is only ever graspable as a mirage, the mirage of a unity which can never be grasped again on the imaginary level, every object relation can only be infected with a fundamental uncertainty by it. That is in fact what so many different experiences show one, and calling them psychopathological conveys nothing since they lie on a continuum with many experiences which themselves are regarded as normal.

That is where the symbolic relation comes in. The power of naming objects structures the perception itself. The *percipi* of man can only be sustained within a zone of nomination. It is through nomination that man makes objects subsist with a certain consistence. If objects had only a narcissistic relationship with the subject, they would only ever be perceived in an momentary fashion. The word, the word which names, is the identical. The word doesn't answer to the spatial distinctiveness of the object, which is always ready to be dissolved in an identification with the subject, but to its temporal dimension. The object, at one instant constituted as a semblance<sup>6</sup> of the human subject, a double of himself, nonetheless has a certain permanence of appearance over time, which however does not endure indefinitely, since all objects are perishable. This appearance which lasts a certain length of time is strictly only recognisable through the intermediary of the name. The name is the time of the object. Naming constitutes a pact, by which two subjects simultaneously come to an agreement to recognise the same object. If the human subject didn't name – as Genesis says it was done in earthly Paradise – the major species first, if the

<sup>6</sup> 'un semblant'.

subjects do not come to an agreement over this recognition, no world, not even a perception, could be sustained for more than one instant. That is the joint, the emergence of the dimension of the symbolic in relation to the imaginary.

In the dream of Irma's injection, it is just when the world of the dreamer is plunged into the greatest imaginary chaos that discourse enters into play, discourse as such, independently of its meaning, since it is a senseless discourse. It then seems that the subject decomposes and disappears. In this dream there's the recognition of the fundamentally acephalic character of the subject, beyond a given point. This point is designated by the *N* of the trimethylamine formula. That's where the *I* of the subject is at that moment. And my suggestion to you that you see in that the dream's last word wasn't said without humour, nor without hesitation, since that is almost a *Witz*. Just when the hydra has lost its heads, a voice which is nothing more than *the voice of no one* causes the trimethylamine formula to emerge, as the last word on the matter, the word for everything. And this word means nothing except that it is a word.

That has almost a delirious air about it, and in fact it is. Let's say that it would be if all by himself the subject, Freud all by himself, analysing his dream, tried to find in it, proceeding as an occultist might, the secret designation of the point where as a matter of fact the solution to the mystery of the subject and the world lies. But he isn't all by himself. Once he communicates the secret of this Luciferian mystery to us, Freud is not confronted with this dream by himself. Just as the dream is addressed to the analyst in an analysis, Freud in his dream is already addressing himself to us.

He is already dreaming for the community of psychologists, of anthropologists. When he interprets this dream, it is us that he is addressing. And that is why seeing the word in the absurd final word of the dream isn't to reduce it to a delirium, since Freud, by means of this dream, makes himself heard by us, and effectively puts us on the road towards his object, which is the understanding of the dream. It isn't just for himself that he finds the *Nemo* or the alpha and omega of the acephalic subject, which represents his unconscious. On the contrary, by means of this dream it's him who speaks, and who realises that he is telling us – without having wanted to, without having recognised it at first, and only recognising it in his analysis of the dream, that is to say while speaking to us – something which is both him and no longer him – *I am he who wants to be forgiven for having dared to begin to cure these patients, who until now no one wanted to understand and whose cure was forbidden. I am he who wants not to be guilty of it, for to transgress any limit imposed up to now on human activity is always to be guilty. I want to not be (born) that. [Je veux n'être pas cela.] Instead of me, there are all the others. Here I am only the representative of this vast, vague movement, the quest for truth, in which I efface myself. I am no longer anything. My ambition was greater than I. No doubt the syringe was dirty. And precisely to the extent that I desired it too much, that I partook in this action, that I wanted to be, myself, the creator, I am not*

*the creator. The creator is someone greater than I. It is my unconscious, it is this voice which speaks in me, beyond me.<sup>7</sup>*

That is the meaning of this dream.

This analysis will now enable us to go further and understand how we should conceive of the death instinct, the death instinct's relation to the symbol, to this speech which is in the subject without being the speech of the subject. A question which we will keep in mind for the time it will take for it to gain weight in our minds, and for us to make the attempt when our turn comes to give a schematisation of the function of the death instinct. We are beginning to see why it is necessary that beyond the pleasure principle, which Freud introduces as being what governs the measure of the ego and installs consciousness in its relation with a world in which it finds itself, that beyond, exists the death instinct. Beyond the homeostases of the ego, there exists a dimension, another current, another necessity, whose plane must be differentiated. This compulsion to return to something which has been excluded by the subject, or which never entered into it, the *Verdrängt*, the repressed, we cannot bring it back within the pleasure principle. If the ego as such rediscovers and recognises itself, it is because there is a beyond to the *ego*, an unconscious, a subject which speaks, unknown to the subject. We must therefore posit another principle.

Why did Freud call it the death instinct?

That's what we will try to get hold of in the encounters to come.

16 March 1955

<sup>7</sup> This passage contains many uses of *je* (I) and *moi* (me) which have great resonances in connection with Lacan's discussion of the subject, the *I* and the *ego* (*moi*). Not all of these are capable of being transmitted in translation.

BEYOND THE IMAGINARY,  
THE SYMBOLIC,  
OR FROM THE LITTLE TO  
THE BIG OTHER

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## Odd or even? Beyond intersubjectivity

AN ULTIMATE QUOD  
THE MACHINE WHICH PLAYS  
MEMORY AND REMINISCENCE  
INTRODUCTION TO THE PURLOINED LETTER

I am sorry that our good friend Riguet isn't here today, for we are going to touch on questions on which he could perhaps have cast some light. We are going to brush up on the data of what in a confused fashion is called cybernetics, which is nonetheless something which concerns us in the highest degree in this little matter we've been pursuing for the last two seminars, *what is the subject?*, in so far as it is, technically speaking, in the Freudian sense of the word, the unconscious subject, and by way of that, essentially the subject who speaks.

Now, it seems more and more clear to us that this subject who speaks is beyond the *ego*.

### 1

Let us begin again at the acme of the specimen dream of Irma's injection. In so far as it continues the quest of the previous day, the dream's quest leads to the gap, to this open mouth at the back of which Freud sees this terrifying, composite image which we compared to the revelation of the Medusa's head.

This dream is not unique in this respect. Those who participated in my seminars the year before they were held here may recall the singular character of the Wolfman's dream, of which it could be said that it has, over the whole of the analysis of this case, a function analogous to the acme which we discern in the dream of Irma's injection. In fact, it enters into account after a long period of analysis, the very intellectualised – a term which isn't in the text but which corresponds well to what Freud means – character of which Freud himself notes, as a kind of analytical game, which nonetheless constitutes an authentic quest on the part of the subject, but for a very long time remains at the surface, as if inoperative. It is a stagnant analysis which promises to be interminable, when at last the dream appears, reactivated by a specific occasion in the life of

the subject, and its great importance deriving from having been repeated many times over, from a given epoch in childhood on.

What is this dream? It is the apparition, through a suddenly opened window, of the sight of a large tree, on whose branches wolves are perched. In the dream and in the drawing which the subject has bequeathed to us, which Freud reproduced, they are sufficiently enigmatic for us legitimately to wonder if they are really wolves, for they have distinctive fox tails, which we have formerly paused over to discuss. As you know, this dream turns out to be extremely rich, and the associations it triggers will lead Freud and his subject to nothing less than to the discovery, purely posited, reconstructed, of the primal scene.

The primal scene is reconstructed from the cross-checking which takes place in the course of analysis, it isn't relived. Nothing emerges in the memory of the subject – we will have to ask ourselves about this term memory – which might lead to talking about the resurrection of the scene, but everything forces one to the conviction that it did indeed happen in this way. So in this respect there's a far more significant gap between this scene and what the subject sees in the dream than the normal distance between the latent content and the manifest content of a dream. And yet, in both cases, we have a fascinating vision, which for a time suspends the subject in a state of captivation in which he loses himself. To Freud, the vision of the dream seems like the reversal of the fascination of the gaze. It is in the gaze of these wolves, so anxiety-provoking in the account of it given by the dreamer, that Freud sees the equivalent of the fascinated gaze of the infant confronted with the scene which profoundly marked him in the imaginary and redirected his entire instinctual life. We find there something like a unique and decisive revelation of the subject, in which an indefinite something that is unsayable is concentrated, in which the subject is lost for a moment, blown up. As in the dream of Irma's injection, the subject decomposes, fades away, dissociates into its various egos. Similarly, after the dream of the Wolfman, we witness the real start of the analysis, which makes possible the dissociation inside the subject of a personality which is so singularly composite that it makes for the originality of the style of the case. As you know, the problems left outstanding by this analysis were to be so serious that in the aftermath it could degenerate into psychosis. As I pointed out to you, one can ask whether the latter wasn't linked to the manoeuvrings of the analysis.

In the two dreams in question, we find ourselves confronted by a sort of ultimate experience, confronted by the apprehension of an ultimate real. What is most anxiety-provoking in Freud's life, his relations with women, his relations with death, are telescoped in the central vision of his dream and could certainly be extracted from it by an associative analysis. Enigmatic image apropos of which Freud evokes the navel of the dream, this abyssal relation to that which is most unknown, which is the hallmark of an exceptional,

privileged experience, in which the real is apprehended beyond all mediation, be it imaginary or symbolic. In short, one could say that such privileged experiences, and especially it would seem in a dream, are characterised by the relation which is established with an absolute other, I mean an other beyond all intersubjectivity.

This beyond of the intersubjective relation is attained most especially on the imaginary level. What's at issue is an essential alien [*dissemblable*], who is neither the supplement, nor the complement of the fellow being [*semblable*], who is the very image of dislocation, of the essential tearing apart of the subject. The subject passes beyond this glass in which he always sees, entangled, his own image. All interposition between the subject and the world ceases. One gets the feeling that a passage into a kind of a-logic occurs, and that's where the problem in fact begins, for we see that we are not in it. And yet the *logos* doesn't forego all its rights here, since that's where the essential meaning of the dream, its liberating meaning, begins, since that's where Freud found an escape from his latent guilt. In the same way, the subject will find the key to his problems beyond the terrifying experience of the Wolfman's dream.

It's also the question we encountered in the little scientific meeting yesterday evening – to what extent does the symbolic relation, the relation of language, retain its value beyond the subject, in as much as it may be characterised as centred in an *ego* – by an *ego*, for an *alter-ego*?

Human knowledge, and by the same token the sphere of relations of consciousness, consists in a certain relation to this structure that we call the *ego*, around which the imaginary relation is centred. The latter has taught us that the *ego* is never just the subject, that it is essentially a relation to the other, that it finds its point of departure and its fulcrum in the other. All the objects are considered from the standpoint of the *ego*.

But all the objects are in fact desired from the standpoint of a primitively discordant subject, a subject fundamentally fragmented by this *ego*. The subject cannot desire without itself dissolving, and without seeing, because of this very fact, the object escaping it, in a series of infinite displacements – I am here alluding to what I call, in a short-hand way, the fundamental disorder of the instinctual life of man. And the tension between the subject – which cannot desire without being fundamentally separated from the object – and the *ego*, where the gaze towards the object starts, is the starting point for the dialectic of consciousness.

I have tried to fashion before you the myth of a consciousness without *ego*, which could be defined as the reflection of the mountain in a lake. The *ego* appears, for its part, in the world of objects, as an object, though a privileged one to be sure. Consciousness in man is by essence a polar tension between an *ego* alienated from the subject and a perception which fundamentally escapes it, a pure *percipi*. The subject would be strictly identical to this perception if there

weren't this *ego* which, if one may put it like this, makes it emerge from out of its very perception in a relationship of tension. Under certain conditions, this imaginary relation itself reaches its own limit, and the *ego* fades away, dissipates, becomes disorganised, dissolves. The subject is precipitated into a confrontation with something which under no circumstances can be confused with the everyday experience of perception, something which we could call an *id*, and which we will simply call, so as not to lead to confusion, a *quod*, a *what-is-it?* The question we're going to raise today concerns this confrontation of the subject beyond the *ego* with the *quod* which seeks to come into being in analysis.

Can an interrogation be sustained concerning this ultimate *quod*, which is the experience of the unconscious subject as such, concerning which we no longer know who or what it is? The evolution of analysis itself in this respect puts us in a peculiarly strange position, in so far as it takes as an irreducible given these tendencies of the subject which on the other hand it shows us to be permeable, traversed and structured like signifiers, playing, beyond the real, in the register of meaning, playing on the equivalence of the signified and the signifier in its most material aspect, plays on words, puns, witticisms – which in the end leads to the abolition of the human sciences, in that the last word of the witticism demonstrates the supreme mastery of the subject in relation to the signified itself, since it puts it to all kinds of use, since it plays with it essentially in order to annihilate it.

I'd now like to draw your attention to an exemplary experience, which will constitute a first step for us towards the elucidation of what a *quis* we are ignorant of ponders, in this beyond of the imaginary relation in which the other is absent and in which all intersubjectivity apparently dissolves.

## 2

You know that a great fuss is made of adding machines in cybernetics. They have even been called thinking machines, in so far as some of them certainly are capable of solving logical problems, conceived, it is true, in a quite artificial manner, so as to confuse the mind for a moment, in such a way that we don't do as well at them as they do.

Today we won't go into these arcana. You can bring a horse to water, but you can't make him drink, and so as not to instill too great an aversion in you to this exercise, I am going to try to lead you into this domain in a more entertaining manner. We have never despised the entertainments of physics and mathematical recreations – you can get a lot out of it.

Amongst these adding or thinking machines there are others which have been dreamt up, which have endearing peculiarities – these are machines which play, inscribed within the functioning and, quite singularly, within the limit of a certain strategy.

Just this fact, that a machine can have a strategy, already leads us to the heart of the problem. For in the end, what is a strategy? How can a machine partake in it? Today I will try to bring home to you the elementary truths which are swept away by that.

A machine has been constructed, so I hear, which plays the game of even and odd. I won't vouch for this, as I haven't seen it, but I can promise you that before the end of these seminars I will – our good friend Riguet told me that he would confront me with it. One must have experience of these things, one can't talk about a machine without having had a shot at it, seen what it can do, made some discoveries, even some sentimental ones. The real eye-opener is that the machine I'm talking about ends up winning. You know the game, you must still have some memories of school. You put two or three marbles in your hand, and you put out your closed fist to the opponent, saying – *Odd or even?* I have, two marbles say, and if he says *odd*, he must hand one over to me. And so on.

Let us try to consider for a moment what it means for a machine to play the game of even and odd. We couldn't work it all out by ourselves, because it would look a bit heavy-handed in the circumstances. A short text comes to our aid, from Edgar Poe, which the cyberneticists, I noticed, make something of. This text is in *The Purloined Letter*, an absolutely sensational short story, which could even be considered as essential for a psychoanalyst.

The characters concerned to recover the purloined letter, which I will tell you more about later, are two policemen. One is the prefect of police, that is to say, in accordance with literary conventions, an idiot. The other is a nobody, an amateur policeman with dazzling intelligence, called Dupin, who foreshadows Sherlock Holmes and those other heroes of the novels you devour in your free time. The latter comes out with the following –

*I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of 'even and odd' attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one; if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks, "Are they even or odd?" Our schoolboy replies, "Odd," and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself, "The simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess odd;" – he guesses odd, and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the first, he would have reasoned thus: "This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to himself upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I*

*will therefore guess even;" — he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the schoolboy, whom his fellows termed "lucky," — what, in its last analysis, is it?*

*'It is merely,' I said, 'an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent.'*

*'It is,' said Dupin; 'and, upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the thorough identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows: "When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression." This response of the schoolboy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochemoucault, to La Bougive, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella.'*

*'And the identification,' I said, 'of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured.'*

We are here faced with reasoning which raises a certain number of problems.

At first glance, it is a matter of simple psychological penetration, a kind of egomimic. The subject adopts a mirror position, enabling him to guess the behaviour of his adversary. Nonetheless, even this method already presupposes the dimension of intersubjectivity, in that the subject has to know that he is faced with another subject, in principle homogeneous with him. The variations to which he may be subject have far less importance than the possible scissions of the position of the other. There is no other ground for psychological reasoning.

What are these scissions? There is a first period [*temps*] in which I suppose the other subject to be in exactly the same position as me, thinking what I am thinking at the very moment I am thinking it. Let us suppose that it seems to me, for my part, that it would be more natural for the other to change theme, for him to switch from even to odd, for instance. In the first period [*temps*], I believe that this is what he will do. The important thing is that there may be a second period [*temps*], in which a less partial subjectivity is manifested. The subject is in fact capable of making himself other, and to end up thinking that the other, being himself an other, thinks like him, and that he has to place himself in the position of a third party, to get out of being this other who is his pure reflection. As third party, I realise that if that other doesn't play the game, he fools his opponent. And from then on I'm ahead of him, by opting for the position opposite to the one which seemed to me, in the first period [*temps*], to be the most natural.

But after this second period [*temps*], you can suppose a third, which makes it extremely difficult to pursue the same analogical reasoning. After all, someone of superior intelligence can in fact understand that the trick is, notwithstanding

the fact that one seems to be very intelligent, to play like an idiot, that is to return to the first formula. What does that mean? This – if the game of even and odd is played on the level of the dual relation, of the equivalence of one and the other, of the *alter ego* and the *ego*, you will very quickly realise that you haven't reached any kind of second order, since as soon as you think of the third, an oscillation returns you to the first. This doesn't preclude something in the technique of the game from partaking as a matter of fact in the mythical identification with the opponent. But that's a fundamental bifurcation.

It may be that something like a divination, which, however, is problematic, is put into effect, a divination by the subject who has a certain sympathetic rapport with the opponent. It's not out of the question that there may have been such a young child who won more frequently than his turn should allow – which is the only definition one can give in this instance of the word *win*. But the heart of the matter lies in a completely different register from that of imaginary intersubjectivity.

That the subject should think the other to be similar [*semblable*] to himself, and that he reasons as he thinks the other must reason – in the first period [*temps*] like this, in the second period like that – is a fundamental point of departure failing which nothing can be thought, yet is nonetheless totally inadequate in helping us penetrate in any degree to where the key to success might be found. I don't consider the interpsychological experience to be excluded in this case, but it insinuates itself within the fragile framework of the imaginary relation to the other, and it hangs on that very uncertainty. Within this framework, the experience is one which fades away. It cannot be made logical. Take another look at the dialectic of the game of black and white discs placed on the backs of the three characters who have to work out what their own sign is on the basis of what they see on the two others. You will be in a position to discover something of the same order.

We will take the other path, the one which can be made logical, the one which can be upheld in discourse. Obviously it imposes itself as soon as your partner is the machine.

It is clear that you don't have to ask yourself whether the machine is stupid or intelligent, whether it will play in accordance with its first or its second go. Inversely, the machine has no means of placing itself in a reflexive position in relation to its human partner.

What is it to play with a machine? The physiognomy of the machine, however prepossessing it may be, can be of no help whatsoever in this instance. No means of getting out of it by way of identification. One is thus from the start forced to take the path of language [*langage*], of the possible combinatory of the machine. One knows one can expect from the machine a series of relations, operating with an excessive rapidity thanks to those amazing relays, the electronic phases, and, according to the latest news, these transistors the

papers can't stop talking about, with a commercial aim in mind no doubt, but one which doesn't put in question the quality of these objects.

But before we ask ourselves what the machine is going to do, let us ask ourselves what it means to win and lose at the game of even and odd.

On the basis of one single go, it has no meaning whatsoever. Whether your answer coincides with what's in your partner's hand is no more surprising than the converse. For one go, it makes no sense, except purely conventionally, to win or to lose. *Odd, even*, it has no importance whatsoever. Do remember that the best translation of the odd number is the number two, which rejoices in being odd, and with reason, for if it didn't have a reason for rejoicing in being odd, it wouldn't be even either. So, all you have to do is invert this game into the game *who loses wins* [*qui perd gagne*], for it to be quite evident that these things are equivalent.

What is more surprising is losing or winning twice in a row. For if on one go you have a 50% chance each way, you have only a 25% chance of repeating it the second time.

+	+
-	-
+	-
-	+

And on the third go, there is only a 12.5% chance of continuing to win or lose.

Moreover, this is purely theoretical, for from then on, I'd like you to see that we are no longer at all in the domain of the real, but in that of the symbolic signification which we've defined by these *plus-minuses* and these *minus-pluses*. From the point of view of the real, on each occasion there are as many chances of winning as of losing. The very notion of probability and chance presupposes the introduction of a symbol into the real. It's a symbol you're addressing, and your chances bear only on the symbol. In the real, at each go, you have as many chances of winning or of losing as on the preceding go. There is no reason why, by a pure fluke, you might not win ten times in a row. This only begins to have meaning when you write a sign, and as long as you're not there to write it, there is nothing that can be called a win. The pact of the game is essential to the reality of the experience sought after.

Now let us see what is going to happen with the machine.

What's interesting is that you end up going through the same motions as you would with a partner. By pushing a button, you ask it a question about a *quod* which you have there in your hand, and all this is about knowing what it is. That already tells you that this *quod* may perhaps not be reality but a symbol. You are asking the machine a question about a symbol, a machine whose structure must in fact bear some family resemblance to the symbolic order, and that is precisely why it is a machine for playing, a strategic machine. But let us not go into details.

The machine is constructed in such a way that it gives a response. You had *plus* in your hand. It gives the answer *minus*. It lost. The fact that it lost consists solely in the dissimilarity [dissemblance] of *plus* and *minus*.

You are obliged to inform the machine that it has lost by inscribing a *minus*. I really don't know whether that is how the machine works, but it's all the same to me – there's no other way it can work, and if it does work some other way, it is equivalent to that.

How on earth can this machine, which in principle should beat me, be put together? Will it play at random? That makes no sense at all. It may well be that for its first three answers it always says the same thing, but that isn't the point. It is in the succession of its answers that we find the beginnings of the phenomenon.

Let us suppose that at the start the machine is really stupid – it really doesn't matter in the least whether it is stupid or intelligent, since being stupid is the height of intelligence. Let us say that, to begin with, it always answers the same thing. It so happens that I, who am intelligent, say *plus*. As it still answers me *minus*, it puts me on the right track. I say to myself – the machine must be a bit slow – I could just as well tell myself the contrary – and in actual fact let us suppose that it loses again.

This is where the fact that we have had several gos must necessarily come into the construction of my machine. Here another section of the machine starts coming into play, recording the fact that it has lost three times – I'm not sure of that, but I can assume it. Besides, as I am very intelligent, but nonetheless not as intelligent as all that, I can suppose that the machine quite stupidly changes and that it's me that is a bit slow on this occasion. This time the machine wins.

1	+	-
2	+	-
3	+	-
4	+	+

Having lost three gos, the machine, then, begins to react. What am I to do? I say to myself – perhaps it will persevere, so I'll change my tune. Let us assume that I win.

5	-	+
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I'm not forced to reason like this, but I want to show you its limits. I can tell myself that, now that it has won, the machine will wait until after the third go to change. So I think that it will play *plus* one more time and I play *minus*. But suppose that the second section comes into play when there has been *minus* three times. So now my machine plays *minus*, and wins yet again.

6	-	-
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I want to draw your attention to the fact that the machine has won twice using rather similar means. This isn't to show you that this is the way in which the machine will win. But depending on the complexity of the elaborated

mechanism, and the successive sections which can furnish a certain amount of information as to the *pluses* or *minuses*, transformations, which in their turn may be coordinated amongst themselves, will end up yielding a temporal modulation analogous to what takes place in the confrontation of two players. All one needs to posit is a machine complex enough to have a sufficient number of superimposed sections bringing together a large enough count of previous goes – instead of grouping three of them, it could group eight or ten – and its range will be beyond my understanding. Nevertheless it cannot go beyond its reproduction on paper, that is to say I myself can also examine it, on condition that I go over the entire combinatory myself before I risk my hand at it. So there I am entering into some sort of rivalry with it.

I want to draw your attention to the fact that, under these conditions, there's no reason why the machine should win rather than me, except for my exhaustion. To reconstruct the number of sections in this machine, the sets sampled by it at every moment whereby it determines its play, I would be faced with problems of such mathematical complexity that I would have to have recourse to – note the irony – an adding machine.

But then, I'm not playing at even and odd, I am playing at predicting the play of the machine. Now, I will start playing, to find out what will happen.

One could suppose the machine to be capable of drawing up a psychological profile of its adversary. But earlier on I drew your attention to the fact that the latter only functions within the framework of intersubjectivity. The whole question is summed up as the problem of knowing whether the other is cunning enough to know that, I too, am an other for him, if he is capable of going beyond this second period [*temps*]. If I suppose him to be identical to myself, by the same token I suppose him capable of thinking with respect to me what I am in the process of thinking concerning him, and to think that I am going to think that he will do the opposite of what he thinks I am in the process of thinking. A simple oscillation which always comes back. From this fact alone, everything pertaining to the order of the psychological profile is completely eliminated.

What happens if, on the other hand, I play at random? You know the chapter in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* which deals with the production of a random number.<sup>1</sup> That's an experiment which certainly does escape the well known metaphor of the rabbit which one is always advised to remember was previously put in the hat. Freud – with the assistance of his subject, but it is clearly because the subject is speaking to Freud that it works – Freud is the first to notice that a number drawn from the hat will quickly bring out things which will lead the subject to that moment when he slept with his little sister, even to the year he failed his baccalaureat because that morning he had masturbated. If we acknowledge such experiences, we will be obliged to postulate that chance

<sup>1</sup> (1901b) Chapter XII, GW IV 270ff; SE VI 242ff.

doesn't exist. While the subject doesn't think about it, the symbols continue to mount one another, to copulate, to proliferate, to fertilise each other, to jump on each other, to tear each other apart. And when you take one out, you can project on to it the speech of this unconscious subject we've been talking about.

In other words, even if the word of my life had to be sought in something as long as an entire recital of the *Aeneid*, it isn't unthinkable that a machine would in time succeed in reconstituting it. Now, any machine can be reduced to a series of relays which are simply *pluses* and *minuses*. Everything, in the symbolic order, can be represented with the aid of such a series.

One mustn't confuse the *history*, in which the unconscious subject inscribes himself, with his *memory* – a word I wouldn't be the first one to tell you is used in a confusing way. On the contrary, at the point we have reached, it is important to draw a very sharp distinction between memory and *remembering* [*remémoration*], which pertains to the order of history.

Memory has been spoken of as a means of characterising the living organism as such. One then says that a living substance, following a given experience, undergoes a transformation such that it will no longer react to the same experience in the same way as before. This is all rather ambiguous – to react differently, what does that mean? within what limits? No longer reacting at all, isn't that an effect of memory? Is the experience of death, definitively recorded, a memory? In any case, there is no reason to identify this memory, a definable property of living substance, with remembering, the grouping and the succession of symbolically defined events, the pure symbol engendering in its turn a succession.

What goes on in the machine at this level, to confine ourselves just to that, is analogous to the remembering we deal with in analysis. Indeed, memory is here the result of integrations. The first section added on to the basic memory is made up of a section which groups results by threes. This result, memorised, is available to be brought in at any moment. But the next moment, it may well no longer be at all the same. It is possible that it has changed content, changed sign, changed structure. If an error occurs in the course of the experience, what happens? It's not what happens afterwards which is modified, but everything which went before. We have a retroactive effect – *nachträglich*, as Freud calls it – specific to the structure of symbolic memory, in other words to the function of remembering.

I think that this little apologue, with its problematic character, has introduced you to the following, that for there to be a subject who asks a question, all that is needed is a *quod* upon which the interrogation bears. Do we even have to concern ourselves with what this subject is and with respect to which other it is to be located? That is totally useless. The most important thing is the symbolic *quod*. For the subject it is like an image in the mirror, but of a different order – it isn't for nothing that Odysseus pierces the eye of the Cyclop.

In so far as he speaks, the subject can perfectly well find his answer, his return, his secret, his mystery, in the constructed symbol which modern machines represent for us, namely something far more acephalic still than what we encountered in the dream of Irma's injection.

It raises the question of the relation of signification to the living man.

### 3

Earlier on we referred to *The Purloined Letter*. Everything in this tale revolves around the problems of signification, of meaning, of received opinion, and precisely because received opinion is held in common, the truth is at stake in it.

You know the theme of the story. The prefect of police is charged with the recovery of a letter which was stolen by someone of considerable distinction, who is perfectly amoral. The character in question lifted this letter from the table in the Queen's boudoir. The letter came from another person of distinction whose relations with her she had reason to hide. She doesn't succeed in hiding the letter as quickly as she wanted to but the gesture she makes is enough for the libertine minister, culprit and hero, to see the importance of the piece of paper. She acts as if nothing had happened, and places the letter in plain view. As for the King, who is also there, by definition he is destined not to notice anything, on condition that one doesn't attract his attention. This is what allows the minister, with a manoeuvre consisting in producing a vaguely analogous letter, which he places on the table, to get his hands on it under the nose and in full view – and that's the snag<sup>2</sup> – of those present, this letter which will for him be a source of considerable power over the royal persons, without anyone being able to say anything about it. The Queen realises full well what is happening, but she is bound by the exact conditions of the three-sided game.

The point is to find the letter. All kinds of speculations, including an echo regarding the game of even and odd, lead one to understand that the play of intersubjectivity is so essential that all that's needed is for someone to have the technique, the knowledge and the rigour, for someone to be fascinated by the real, as very intelligent people are, which makes them strict imbeciles. The house of the minister is searched inch by inch, numbering each cubic foot. Everything is looked at through the microscope, long needles passed through cushions, all the scientific methods are employed. And the letter isn't found. However, the letter has to be in the house, for the minister must have constant access to it so as to be able to shove it under the King's nose. He doesn't carry it on himself, since they had him pickpocketed.

The play here is on the very seductive idea that the more the policemen act

<sup>2</sup> 'puisque la barbe est là' – an untranslatable pun on the preceding phrase which also employs the word 'barbe' ('s'emparer au nez et à la barbe').

like policemen the less they'll find. It will never occur to them that the letter is right under their noses, hung on a ribbon above the fireplace. The thief was content just to give it a wellworn look, to camouflage it by turning it inside out and putting another seal on it. The extremely sly character, who has his reasons for bearing a grudge against the minister, doesn't pass up the opportunity of taking the letter and substituting another for it, which will be the downfall of his enemy.

But that isn't the point. What is it that makes this rather improbable tale so convincing? After all, it is surprising that the police didn't find the letter in the course of their ransack. To explain that, Poe places intersubjectivity in the forefront – the clever guy goes to the limit of what is unthinkable for the other, and as such will escape. But if you read the tale for its fundamental value, you will realise that there's another key, which makes the whole thing hang together, and which brings with it conviction, whereas, if presented somewhat differently, the story wouldn't interest us for one moment.

It seems to me, that you analysts, you should recognise this key immediately – it is simply the identity of the symbolic formula of the situation, in the two principal steps in its development. The Queen thought the letter was safe because there it was, bang in front of everybody. And the minister also leaves it out in the open, thinking that therefore it can't be taken. It isn't because he is a strategist, but because he is a poet, that he wins, until the intervention of the super-poet, Dupin.

Nothing in the way of intersubjectivity is decisive here, because once the measures of the real are made tight, once a perimeter, a volume, is defined once and for all, there is nothing to lead one to suspect that when all is said and done even a letter might escape. If nonetheless the fact that they can't find it is convincing, it is because the domain of significations continues to exist, even in the mind of people assumed to be as stupid as policemen. If the police do not find it, it isn't only because it is in too accessible a place, but as a consequence of this signification, namely that a letter of great value, upon which the might of the State now bears, with the rewards which may accrue in such a case, has to be hidden with exceeding care. Quite naturally, the slave assumes that the master is a master, and that when he has something precious within his reach, he grabs it. In the same way, one thinks that when one has reached a certain point of comprehension in psychoanalysis, one can grab it and say – *Here it is, we've got it.* On the contrary, signification as such is never where one thinks it must be.

The merit of the apologue is of this order. It is on the basis of the analysis of the symbolic value of the different moments in the drama that its coherence, and even its psychological motivation, can be discovered.

It isn't a game for the subtlest, it isn't a psychological game, it is a dialectical game.

## COMPLEMENT

### *The next session: THE SEMINAR PLAYS*

Today, the holidays are getting nearer, it's a lovely day, so let's do something short and sweet.

Last time we discussed dual intersubjectivity and its mirages. It isn't all mirage, but if we look at our neighbour and think that he's thinking what we're thinking, it's a gross error. That has to be our starting point.

I've shown you the limits of what can be founded on the basis of this dual intersubjectivity, by turning to this famous game of even and odd which, so as not to invent it, I took from Poe – and there is no reason for not thinking that he inherited it from the mouth of the child who used to win at this game.

Playing isn't that difficult. The most natural movement is simply to change from even to odd. The intelligent guy will do the opposite. But on the third occasion [*temps*], the most intelligent course is to act like an idiot, or the alleged idiot. That is to say, everything loses its signification. I have thus shown you that in order to play this game in a reasonable fashion, you must try to undo any grip your adversary may have.

The next step – and this is the Freudian hypothesis – consists in positing that there is nothing random in whatever we undertake with the intention of doing so at random.

I have drawn up on the board what nowadays passes for a machine. When a subject comes up with something at random, it will isolate the formula by which this comes about, a formula which can always be isolated, and in some way it reflects the compulsion to repeat, in as much as it is beyond the pleasure principle, beyond relations, rational motivations, beyond feelings, beyond anything to which we can accede. In the beginnings of psychoanalysis, this beyond is the unconscious, in so far as we cannot reach it, it's the transference in so far as that is really what modulates feelings of love and of hatred, which aren't the transference – the transference is what makes it possible for us to interpret this language composed out of everything the subject can present us with, a language which, outside of psychoanalysis is, in principle, incomplete and misunderstood. That is what the beyond of the pleasure principle is. It is the beyond of signification. The two are indistinguishable.

**O. MANNONI:** *Your attempt at eliminating intersubjectivity nonetheless seems to me to leave it untouched.*

I will have you notice that I do not eliminate it. I take a case in which it may be subtracted. Of course, it can't be eliminated.

**O. MANNONI:** *Perhaps it isn't subtracted, because in the law of repetition which we obey without knowing it, two things must be considered. One is that it may not be*

*detectable in the thing that's repeated. One could make an indefinite arithmetical study of the numbers and not find the law of repetition, if, for example, we take the rhythms into account. If we repeat words, it may be because a certain number rhyme with the unconscious thought. At that moment, no mathematician could find the reason behind the succession of numbers – that will lie outside the domain of the machine.*

I like what you're saying.

O. MANNONI: *And on the other hand, if the law is discovered, by this very fact, an equality is produced in the following manner – by one of the players discovering it, while the other doesn't. For a law that's discovered is no longer a law.*

But of course, my dear friend, the last time, to simplify. I made the subject play with a machine.

O. MANNONI: *That introduces the struggle between the two subjects.*

But of course. But let us begin with the element. The simple possibility of making the subject play with a machine is already sufficiently instructive. That isn't to say that the machine can find the reason for my visions. I said that my personal formula might be as long as a recital of the *Aeneid*, but there's nothing to say that such a recital would give us all the significations. If we are already to find rhymes, we could be certain that we're in the presence of *symbolic efficacy*. I employ this term of Claude Lévi-Strauss's<sup>1</sup> here in relation to a machine. Are we to believe that symbolic efficacy is due to man? Our entire discourse here puts it into question. This question would in any case only be decided one way or another if we had an idea of how language is born – something which we must renounce any knowledge of for a long time.

In the face of this symbolic efficacy, what we need to do today is to highlight a certain symbolic *inertia*, characteristic of the subject, of the unconscious subject.

To this end I am going to propose to you that we play the game of even and odd in an ordered fashion, and we are going to record the results. I'll work them up during the holidays, and we will see whether we can draw any conclusions from them.

That will depend on the following – is there a difference between a list of deliberately selected numbers and a sequence of numbers chosen at random? It is up to the mathematician, to M. Riguet who's present here, to explain to us what a sequence of numbers chosen at random is. You can't imagine how difficult it is. It has taken generations of mathematicians parrying right and left, to succeed truly in saying what numbers chosen at random are.

Riguet, you will be the note-taker in this first game. David, you are going to play even and odd with Mannoni.

<sup>1</sup> See C. Lévi-Strauss, 'Symbolic efficacy' in *Structural Anthropology* (1958), trans. C. Jacobson and B. Grundfest Schoepf, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.

O. MANNONI: *I, for one, cheat at this particular game.*

I couldn't care less.

(*Play between M. David and M. Mannoni.*)

O. MANNONI: *It's very simple, every time I said it at random, I won. When I no longer had a rule, I often lost. The rule varied. At one point, I took the order from verses of Mallarmé, then a telephone number, a car registration number, then what's written on the blackboard, using vowels and consonants.*

How many goes did you have with the first rule?

O. MANNONI: *That is when I really won.*

That was only to keep your interest up. Now we want to have something from each of you, something written in whatever style you like – you can do it as fast as you can, and I think that the faster it is, the better it will be – while thinking that you are playing even and odd with the machine. But I ask you not to go about it the way Mannoni did. Do it at random. Show us your symbolic inertia.

(*The participants play, and hand their sheets in to J. Lacan.*)

30 March 1955

# XVI

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## *The Purloined Letter*



The captivating paper you heard yesterday presented you with what we would call the play of the image and the symbol.<sup>1</sup> That not everything in this relation can be expressed in genetic terms is in fact what emerges from Mme Dolto's work, and that is precisely why she is *at one* with our teaching.

There are thousands of ways of becoming interested as therapists in the aetiology of schizophrenia. To be sure, there is doubtless a medical dimension here, that of diagnosis, of prognosis, but by adapting her vantage point, she throws vivid and profound light on the characteristic phenomenon of this stage of individual development, and no praise is too high for the genius and honesty of her experience. We can't make our categories work everywhere, but nonetheless they enable us to operate a wholesale reshaping of nosography, such as Perrier has started on.

O. MANNONI: *What bothers me is that you assimilate drawing, the graphic, to the imaginary. Now, it seems to me that a drawing is already an obscure elaboration of the imaginary.*

I talked about the imaginary, I didn't say that it was a drawing, which is already a symbol.

O. MANNONI: *But not quite, which is what intrigues me.*

Of course, it will intrigue you so long as we haven't taken a drawing as the object, nor begun to raise the question as to what it is together. But it isn't our object this year.

My comments last time were aimed at giving you a clear sense of the relation of the subject to the symbolic function. We will take further steps in that direction today.

<sup>1</sup> On 26 April 1955, Françoise Dolto gave a paper to a Scientific Session of the Société Française de Psychanalyse, entitled 'A clinical case of the recovery of language'.

## 1

The symbol's emergence into the real begins with a wager. The very notion of cause, when viewed as being capable of bringing with it a mediation between the chain of symbols and the real, is established on the basis of an original wager – will it be this or not? It's not for nothing that the notion of probability takes up a place at the very heart of the development of the physical sciences, as the most recent discussions in epistemology show us; nor is it for nothing that probability theory is reviving a set of problems which, throughout the history of thought, for centuries, have alternately been highlighted and occulted.

The wager lies at the heart of any radical question bearing on symbolic thought. Everything comes back to *to be or not to be*,<sup>2</sup> to the choice between what will or won't come out, to the primordial couple of *plus* or *minus*. But presence as absence connotes possible absence or presence. As soon as the subject himself comes to be, he owes it to a certain non-being on which he raises his being. And if he isn't, if he isn't something, he obviously bears witness to some kind of absence, but he will always remain purveyor of this absence, I mean that he will bear the burden of its proof for lack of being capable of proving the presence.

That's what's important about this chain of *pluses* and *minuses*, aligned here on a bit of paper, drawn from diverse experimental set-ups. The examination of the results we've gathered has concrete value, in showing certain deviations in the curve of gains and losses.

As we saw last time, playing amounts to pursuing in a subject an alleged regularity which escapes observation, but which must be translated into the results by something of a deviation in the probability curve. That is in fact what the facts tend to show, indicating that just by the simple fact of dialogue, even the most blind, no pure game of chance exists, instead there is already the articulation of one word with another. This word is included in the fact that even when the subject plays by himself, his play only has any meaning if he says in advance what he thinks will come out. You can play heads or tails by yourself. But from the point of view of speech, you aren't playing by yourself – there is already the articulation of three signs, comprising a win or a loss, and this articulation prefigures the very meaning of the result. In other words, if there is no question, there is no game, if there is no structure there is no question. The question is constituted, organised, by the structure.

By itself, the play of the symbol represents and organises, independently of the peculiarities of its human support, this something which is called a subject. The human subject doesn't foment this game, he takes his place in it, and plays the role of the little *pluses* and *minuses* in it. He is himself an element in this chain

<sup>2</sup> English in the original.

which, as soon as it is unwound, organises itself in accordance with laws. Hence the subject is always on several levels, caught up in crisscrossing networks.

Anything from the real can always come out. But once the symbolic chain is constituted, as soon as you introduce a certain significant unity, in the form of unities of succession, what comes out can no longer be just anything.

Let us agree to group the *pluses* and the *minuses* which may come up into threes, and to call the sequences 1, 2, or 3, according to which type they belong.

(1)	(2)	(3)
+	+	+
—	—	—
—	—	+
—	+	—
+	—	—

This transformation alone gives rise to extremely precise laws. The 1s, the 2s, and the 3s cannot succeed each other in just any order. A 1 will never be able to follow a 3, a 1 will never come after any odd-numbered sequence of 2s. But after an even number of 2s, a 1 is possible. An indefinite number of 2s is always possible between a 1 and a 3.

Starting with this, you can constitute other significant unities, representing the intervals between two of these groups.

Passing from 1 to 2  $\rightarrow \beta$

Passing from 2 to 2  $\rightarrow \gamma$

Passing from 1 to 1 }  $\rightarrow \alpha$

Passing from 1 to 3 }  $\rightarrow \alpha$

Shift back from 2 to 1 }  $\rightarrow \delta$   
Shift back from 2 to 3 }

You can verify that after the repetition of a great number of  $\alpha$ s, if there'd been a  $\beta$  before, only a  $\delta$  could follow. So this is a primitive symbolic organisation which already enables one to go beyond the metaphors I used the other day in speaking of memory internal to the symbol. In some way, the series of  $\alpha$ s remembers that it cannot express anything but a  $\delta$ , if a  $\beta$ , however far away it might have been, occurred before the series of  $\alpha$ s.

You see the possibilities of demonstration and theorematisation which can be derived from the simple use of these symbolic series. From the start, and independently of any attachment to some supposedly causal bond, the symbol already plays, and produces by itself, its necessities, its structures, its organisations. That is indeed what occurs in our discipline, in so far as it consists in getting to the bottom of the significance of the symbolic order for the world of the human subject.

Within this perspective, what is immediately clear is what I have called the inmixing of subjects. I will illustrate it for you, since chance has offered it to us, with the story of *The Purloined Letter*, from which we took the example of the game of even and odd.



## 2

This example is introduced by the spokesman of the tale's meaning, and it is supposed to give an elementary image of the intersubjective relation, founded upon the following – as a function of the other's supposed capacities for trickery, for dissimulation, for strategy, capacities to be found in a dual reflective relation, the subject assumes the thought of this other. This depends upon the idea that there is a way of distinguishing the understanding of the idiot from that of the intelligent man.

I have stressed how fragile this point of view is, even how completely alien it is to what is at issue, for the simple reason that the intelligent thing to do, in this case, is to play the idiot. However, Poe is a prodigiously alert man, and all you have to do is read the whole of the text to see the extent to which the symbolic structure of the story far surpasses the scope of this reasoning, so attractive for a moment, but excessively weak, and whose sole function here is as a booby trap.

I would like those who have read *The Purloined Letter* since I mentioned it to raise their hands – not even half the room!

Even so, I think you know that it's a story about a letter stolen in sensational and exemplary circumstances, which is narrated by a hapless prefect of police, who plays the role, classic in this kind of mythology, of someone who has to find what is being sought after, but who cannot but end up losing the thread. In short, this prefect asks a certain Dupin to get him out of this tangle. Dupin, for his part, represents the character, more mythical still, who understands everything. But the story goes well beyond the register of comedy tied to the fundamental images which make up the genre of police detection.

The august figure whose outline is to be discerned in the background of the story seems to be none other than a royal personage. The scene is set in France, under the restored monarchy. So the authority is certainly not invested with the sacred aspect which can keep at a distance the hands of the bold as they make an attempt on it.

A minister, himself a man of high rank, of great social facility, who is in the confidence of the royal couple, since he is to be found discussing affairs of State in the private quarters of the King and the Queen, notices the discomforture of the latter, who is trying to dissimulate from her august partner the presence on the table of nothing less than a letter, whose superscription and meaning the minister immediately remarks. A secret correspondence is at stake. If the letter is there, thrown indifferently on the table, it is precisely so that the King won't

notice it. The Queen is banking on his inattention, maybe even his blindness.

The minister, for his part, keeping his eyes skinned, realises what is going on, and plays a little game, which consists in first diverting the company, then in taking from his pocket a letter which happens to be on him, and which vaguely resembles the object – from now on we can call it the object of litigation. After having waved it around, he casually places it on the table next to the first letter. Then, profiting from the inattention of the main character, all he has to do is gently take the letter, and put it in his pocket without the Queen, who hasn't missed a single detail of this entire scene, being able to do anything but resign herself to watching the disappearance under her very eyes of this compromising document.

I'll skip the rest. At all costs, the Queen wants to recover this instrument of pressure, if not of blackmail. She calls in the police. The police, whose destiny it is to find nothing, find nothing. And it is Dupin who solves the problem, and discovers the letter, in the minister's apartment, in the most obvious place, within reach, scarcely disguised at all. To be sure, it would seem that it shouldn't have escaped the notice of the police, since it was included within the orbit of their microscopic examination.

In order to lay his hands on it, Dupin gets someone to fire a shot outside. While the minister goes to the window to see what is happening, Dupin goes to the letter, and quickly substitutes another for it, containing the following verses:

. . . *un dessein si funeste,*  
*S'il n'est digne d'Atréa, est digne de Thyeste.*<sup>3</sup>

These lines are taken from Crébillon the elder's *Atréa et Thyeste*, and have a far greater significance than just being an excuse for our re-reading the whole of this rather curious tragedy.

This episode is quite odd, if one includes in it the note of cruelty with which the character who seems the most detached, impartial, the Dupin of the tale, rubs his hands and gloats over the thought of the drama which he is bound to have triggered. At this point, it isn't only Dupin speaking, but the storyteller, the mirage of the author. We will see what this mirage signifies.

The drama will come to a climax as follows – the minister, when challenged to show his strength, because from then on he'll be resisted, one day will pull out the letter. *Show me* – he'll be told – *Here it is* – he will answer. And he'll be covered in ridicule, if not caught up in tragedy.

So that is how the tale unfolds.

There are two great scenes – not in the sense in which we say primal scene – the scene of the letter purloined and the scene of the letter recovered, and then some accessory scenes. The scene in which the letter is recovered is duplicated.

<sup>3</sup> ' . . . so infamous a scheme/ If not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes'. – Act V. Scene V.

since, having discovered where it is, Dupin doesn't take it straightforwardly – he has to set the trap, prepare his little cabal, and also the substitute-letter. There is also the imaginary scene at the end, in which we see the enigmatic character of the story meeting his end, this ambitious character, so singularly etched out, of whom one wonders what his ambition actually is. Is he simply a gambler? He gambles with a challenge, his aim – and that is what would make him an ambitious man – seems to be to show how far he can go. Where he goes is of no importance to him. The aim of his ambition is dissipated by the essential fact of its exercise.

Who are the characters? We could count them on our fingers. There are the real characters – the King, the Queen, the minister, Dupin, the prefect of police and the *agent provocateur* who shoots in the street. There are also those who do not appear on stage and make back-stage noises. These are the *dramatis personae*, in general one has a list of them at the beginning of a play.

Isn't there another way of doing it?

The characters in question can be defined differently. They can be defined beginning with the subject, more precisely beginning with the relation determined by the aspiration of the real subject through the necessity of the symbolic linking process.

Let us begin with the first scene. There are four characters – the King, the Queen, the minister, and the fourth, who is it?

M. GUÉNINCHAULT: *The letter.*

Yes, of course, the letter and not the person who sends it. Although his name is given towards the end of the novel, he has only a fictional importance, whereas the letter is indeed a character. It is so much a character that we are completely entitled to identify it with the key-schema we came upon, at the end of the dream of Irma's injection, in the formula for trimethylamine.

The letter is here synonymous with the original, radical, subject. What we find here is the symbol being displaced in its pure state, which one cannot come into contact with without being immediately caught in its play. Thus, the tale of *The Purloined Letter* signifies that there's nothing in destiny, or causality, which can be defined as a function of existence. One can say that, when the characters get a hold of this letter, something gets a hold of them and carries them along and this something clearly has dominion over their individual idiosyncrasies. Whoever they might be, at this stage of the symbolic transformation of the letter, they will be defined solely by their position in relation to this radical subject, by their position in one of the CHs. This position isn't fixed. In so far as they have entered into the necessity, into the movement peculiar to the letter, they each become, in the course of successive scenes, functionally different in relation to the essential reality which it constitutes. In other words, to take this story up again in its exemplary form, for each of them

the letter is his unconscious. It is his unconscious with all of its consequences, that is to say that at each point in the symbolic circuit, each of them becomes someone else.

That is what I am going to try to show you.

### 3

Every human drama, every theatrical drama in particular, is founded on the existence of established bonds, ties, pacts. Human beings already have commitments which tie them together, commitments which have determined their places, names, their essences. Then along comes another discourse, other commitments, other speech. It is quite certain that there'll be some places where they'll have to come to blows. All treaties aren't signed simultaneously. Some are contradictory. If you go to war, it is so as to know which treaty will be binding. Thank God, there are many occasions on which one doesn't go to war, and treaties continue to hold good, the slipper continues to circulate amongst people, in several directions all at once, and sometimes the object of a game of hunt-the-slipper encounters that of another game of hunt-the-slipper. Subdivision, reconversion, substitution take place. Whoever is engaged in playing hunt-the-slipper in one circle has to hide the fact that he is also playing in another.

It's not for nothing that we see royalty appearing here. They become symbolic of the fundamental character of the commitment entered into in the beginning. Respect for the pact which unites a man and a woman has a value essential to the whole of society, and this value has always been embodied to the greatest extent in the persons of the royal couple, who are playing. This couple is the symbol of the major pact, which reconciles the male element and the female element, and it traditionally plays a mediating role between everything we don't know, the cosmos, and the social order. Quite rightly, there's nothing more scandalous and reprehensible than something which threatens it.

To be sure, in the present state of interhuman relations, tradition has been pushed into the background, or at least it is veiled. You remember the saying of King Farouk, according to which there are now only five kings left in the world, the four kings in a deck of cards and the King of England.

What, after all, is a letter? How can a letter be purloined [*volée*]?<sup>4</sup> To whom does it belong? To whoever sent it or to whoever it is addressed? If you say that it belongs to whoever sent it, what makes a letter a gift? Why does one send a letter? And if you think that it belongs to the recipient, how is it that, under

<sup>4</sup> In what follows, there is an extended pun on the two meanings of *voler* – to fly, and to steal, to purloin. Cf. 'to lift'.

certain circumstances, you return your letters to the person who, for a period in your life, bombarded you with them?

When one considers one of those proverbs attributed to the wisdom of nations – the wisdom of which is thus denominated by antiphrase – one is sure to light upon a stupidity. *Verba volant, scripta manent*. Has it occurred to you that a letter is precisely speech which flies [volet]? If a stolen [volée] letter is possible, it is because a letter is a fly-sheet [*feuille volante*]. It is *scripta* which *volant*, whereas speech, alas, remains. It remains even when no one remembers it any more. Just as, after five hundred thousand signs in the series of *pluses* and *minuses*, the appearance of  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ ,  $\delta$  will still be determined by the same laws.

Speech remains.<sup>5</sup> You can't help the play of symbols, and that is why you must be very careful what you say. But the letter, for its part, that goes away. It wanders all by itself. I have often insisted, so that M. Guiraud might understand, that there could be two kilos of language on the table. There is no need for there to be that much – a very small sheet of vellum is just as much a language [*langage*] being here. It is here, and it exists only as language, it is the fly-sheet. But it is also something else, which has a particular function, absolutely incapable of being assimilated to any other human object.

So the characters play their parts. There is a character who trembles, the Queen. Her function consists in not trembling beyond a certain limit. Were she to tremble just a touch more, if the reflection of the lake which she represents – because she is the only one who is truly fully aware of the scene – were further troubled, she would no longer be the Queen, she would be completely ridiculous, and we wouldn't be able to bear Dupin's final cruelty. But she stays mum. There's a character who doesn't see anything, the King. There is the minister. There is the letter.

This letter, this speech addressed to the Queen by someone, the duc de S., to whom is it truly addressed? As soon as it is speech, it may have several functions. It has the function of a certain pact, of a certain trust. It doesn't matter whether it is about the duke's love or about a plot against the security of the State, or even about a banality. There it is, disguised in a kind of presence-absence. There it is, but it isn't there, it only has its own value in relation to everything it threatens, to everything it violates, to everything it flouts, to everything it places in danger or in suspense.

This letter, which doesn't have the same meaning everywhere, is a truth which is not to be divulged. As soon as it gets into the pocket of the minister, it is no longer what it was before, whatever it was that it had been. It is no longer a love letter, a letter of trust, the announcement of an event, it is evidence, on this occasion a court exhibit. If we imagine that this poor King, seized by some great enthusiasm which would make of him a king of greater grace, one of those

<sup>5</sup> It should be borne in mind that Lacan is referring to specific occasions of speaking, as well as to the function of speech in general, which the translation of both '*les paroles*' and '*une parole*' by 'speech' might lead one to overlook.

kings who isn't easy-going, who isn't capable of letting something go past, and is capable of sending his worthy spouse in front of the judges, as was seen at certain moments in English history – it's always England – we realise that the identity of the recipient of a letter is as problematic as the question of knowing to whom it belongs. In any case, from the moment it falls into the hands of the minister, it has in itself become something else.

The minister then does something very peculiar. You'll say that it is in the nature of things. But why should we, us analysts, be satisfied with the crude appearances of motivations?

I wanted to take a letter of the period out of my pocket to show you how they were folded, and naturally I've forgotten it at home. At that time, letters were very pretty. They were folded more or less like this – and one put a seal or a sealing wafer on it.

The minister wants the letter to go unnoticed, by means of his cunning trick, so he folds it the other way, and crumples it. By refolding it, it is quite possible to make a small surface, blank and flat, appear, on which one can place another superscription and another seal, black instead of red. In place of the slanted writing of the noble lord, there's the feminine writing which addresses the letter to the minister himself. And it is in this guise that the letter lies in the card-rack where the lynx eye of Dupin will not miss it, because he has, as have we, meditated on what a letter is.

This transformation is not sufficiently well explained, for us analysts, by the fact that the minister wants it not to be recognised. He didn't transform it in any old way. This letter, whose nature we do not know, he has in some way addressed it to himself with its new and false appearance, it is even specified by whom – by a woman of his own standing, who has a diminutive feminine hand – and he has it sent to him with his own seal.

Now this is a curious relation to oneself. The letter undergoes a sudden feminisation, and at the same time it enters into a narcissistic relation – since it is now addressed in this sophisticated feminine hand, and bears his own seal. It's a sort of love-letter he's sent himself. This is very obscure, indefinable, I don't want to force anything, and in truth if I mention this transformation, it is because it is correlative of something else far more important, concerning the subjective behaviour of the minister himself.

Let us pause over this drama, let us see what knits it together.

What makes the fact that the letter is in the possession of the minister so painful that everything stems from the Queen's absolutely imperative need to recover it?

As the narrator, who is also a witness, one of the intelligent interlocutors, observes, this affair gains its significance solely if the Queen knows that the document is in the hands of the minister. She knows, while the King knows nothing.

Let us suppose that the minister then behaves with intolerable cheek. He

knows he is powerful, he behaves as such. And the Queen – we are obliged to think that she has a voice in these affairs – intervenes on his behalf. The desires one attributes to the powerful minister are satisfied, so and so is nominated to such and such a position, he acquires some specified person as a colleague, he is permitted to form majorities in the monarchical Parliament, which is quite clearly all too constitutional. But there's nothing to indicate that the minister has ever said anything, ever asked anything of the Queen. On the contrary, he has the letter and he remains silent.

He remains silent, while he is the holder of a letter which threatens the foundation of the pact. He holds the threat of a profound, unrecognised, repressed disorder, and he remains silent. His attitude might be one which we would qualify as being highly moral. He might have made representations to the Queen. He would then, of course, be hypocritical; but he could pose as the defender of the honour of his master, as the vigilant guardian of order. And perhaps the intrigue established with the duc de S. is dangerous to the policies which he takes to be the good ones. But he does nothing of the sort.

He is presented to us as an essentially romantic character, and he is somewhat reminiscent of M. de Chateaubriand, whom we would not recall as being a very noble character, had he not been Christian. Indeed, if we read the true meaning of his *Mémoires*, doesn't he declare himself tied to the monarchy by his solemn pledge, only to tell us, in the most clearcut fashion, that, having said that, he thinks they are filth? In such a way that he can seem to cut the figure of this *monstrum horrendum* we are told about in order to justify Dupin's final outburst. As the reading of Chateaubriand demonstrates, there is a way of defending principles which turns out to be the best way of destroying them.

Why are we told that the minister is such a monster, a man devoid of principles? When you look more closely, it means that he gives no sense of something of the order of compensation or of some sort of sanction to what he has in his power. He makes nothing of the knowledge he has as to the truth about the pact. He doesn't reproach the Queen, he doesn't urge her to return to the order of things, by placing himself in the position of a confessor or director of conscience, no more than he will say tit for tat to her. He suspends the power conferred on him by the letter in indeterminacy, he gives it no symbolic meaning, all he plays on is the fact that this mirage, this reciprocal fascination is established between himself and the Queen, which is what I told you about earlier on, in speaking of the narcissistic relation. The dual relation between master and slave, founded in the last resort on the indeterminate threat of death, but on this occasion on the fears of the Queen.

These fears of the Queen, if you look at them closely, are quite out of proportion. For, as is noted in the tale, this letter may well be a terrible weapon, but all that is needed for it to be destroyed is for it to be put to use. It is a double-edged sword. We don't know what would ensue from the disclosure of the letter

to the retributive justice, not only of a King, but of an entire council, of the entire organisation involved in such a scandal.

In the end, the intolerable nature of the pressure constituted by the letter is due to the fact that the minister has the same attitude as the Queen in relation to the letter – he doesn't speak of it. And he doesn't speak of it because he can no more speak of it than she can. And simply from the fact that he cannot speak of it, he finds himself in the course of the second scene in the same position as the Queen, and he won't be able to do anything other than let himself be dispossessed of it. This is not due to the ingenuity of Dupin, but to the structure of things.

The purloined letter has become a hidden letter. Why don't the policemen find it? They don't find it because they do not know what a letter is. They don't know that because they are the police. Every legitimate power always rests, as does any kind of power, on the symbol. And the police, like all powers, also rest on the symbol. In troubled times, as you have found out, you would let yourselves be arrested like sheep if some guy had said *Police* to you and shown you a card, otherwise you would have started beating him up as soon as he laid a hand on you. Except there's a small difference between the police and power, namely that the police have been persuaded that their efficacy rests on force – not so as to put trust in them, but on the contrary to curb their functions. And thanks to the fact that the police think that they are able to exercise their functions through force, they are as powerless as one could wish.

When one teaches them something different, as has been done for some time in some parts of the world, we know what it leads to. One obtains universal adherence to what we will simply call doctrine. One can put anyone in more or less any position in relation to the system of symbols, and one thus extracts all the confessions in the world, you can make anyone endorse any element of the symbolic chain, at the whim of the symbol's naked power when a certain personal meditation is missing.

Believing in force, and by the same token in the real, the police search for the letter. As they say – *We looked everywhere*. And they didn't find, because what was at stake was a letter and a letter is precisely nowhere.

That isn't a witticism. Think about it – why don't they find it? It is there. They have seen it. What did they see? A letter. They may even have opened it. But they didn't recognise it. Why? They had a description of it – *It has a red seal and a certain address*. Now, it has another seal and it doesn't have that address. You will tell me – *What about the text?* Well, that's it, they weren't given the text. For, one or the other must be true, either the text has some importance or it doesn't. If it has some importance, and even if no one besides the King could understand it, there is nonetheless some point in not yelling it from the rooftops.

You do see, then, that only in the dimension of truth can something be

hidden. In the real, the very idea of a hidden place is insane – however deep into the bowels of the earth someone may go bearing something, it isn't hidden there, since if he went there, so can you. Only what belongs to the order of truth can be hidden. It is truth which is hidden, not the letter. For the policemen, the truth doesn't matter, for them there is only reality, and that is why they do not find anything.

In contrast, besides his remarks about the game of even and odd, Dupin makes linguistic, mathematical, religious observations, he constantly speculates about the symbol, even going so far as to speak of the non-sense of mathematics – for which I apologise to the mathematicians present here. Why don't you try, he says, to say one day to a mathematician that  $x^2 + px$  maybe isn't exactly equal to  $q$  – and he'll immediately flatten you. But that's not true, since I often share my suspicions on this subject with Riguet, and nothing like that ever happened to me. On the contrary, our friend encourages me to pursue these speculations. In the end, it is because Dupin has thought a little about the symbol and about truth that he will see what there is to be seen.

In the scene which is described to us, Dupin finds himself treated to an odd display. The minister reveals a splendid indolence – which doesn't fool the astute man, who knows that beneath it there's an extreme vigilance, the terrible daring of the romantic character capable of anything, for whom the term *sang-froid* seems to have been invented, take a look at Stendhal. So there he is, lounging, bored, dreaming – *In a decadent epoch nothing is sufficient to occupy the mind of a great thinker. What is to be done when everything is going to the dogs?* That's the theme. While this is going on, Dupin, with green glasses on, looks everywhere and tries to make us believe that it is his genius which enables him to see the letter. But that's not true.

In the same way as the Queen had in fact indicated the letter to the minister, so it is the minister who surrenders his secret to Dupin. Isn't there some echo between the letter with a feminine superscription and this languishing Paris? Dupin literally reads what has become of the letter in the enervated attitude of this character of whom nobody knows what he wants, besides pushing as far as possible the gratuitous exercise of his activity as gambler. He defies the world just as he defied the royal couple with the abduction of the letter. What does this mean? – save that in order to be in the same position vis-à-vis the letter as the Queen was, in an essentially feminine position, the minister falls prey to the same trick as she did.

You will tell me that there aren't three characters plus the letter, as before. The letter is indeed there, there are two characters, but where is the King? Well, it is obviously the police. If the minister feels so at ease, that's because the police forms part of his security, as the King formed part of the Queen's security. An ambiguous protection – it is the protection which he owes

her in the sense in which a husband owes aid and protection to his wife, it is also the protection which she owes to his blindness. But all it took was a little, a small change of equilibrium, for the letter to be lifted through the chink. And that's what happens to the minister.

It is a mistake on his part to think that, since the police who've been searching his town-house for months haven't found it, he has no cause for worry. This doesn't prove anything, no more than the presence of the King incapable of seeing the letter was an efficacious protection for the Queen. What's his mistake? It is having forgotten that if the police haven't found the letter, it isn't that the letter can't be found, but rather that the police were looking for something else. The ostrich feels secure because its head is buried in the sand – he's the perfected ostrich, who would think itself safe because another ostrich [*autre autruche*] – other-ich [*autrui-che*] – has its head buried in the sand.<sup>6</sup> And it leaves its behind to be plucked by a third, who takes possession of its feathers and makes a panache of them.

The minister is in what had been the Queen's position, the police are in that of the King, of this degenerate King who believes only in the real, and who sees nothing. The step-wise displacement of the characters is perfect. And simply because he interposed himself in the rest of the discourse, and came into possession of this little nothing of a letter, sufficient to wreak havoc, this most cunning of foxes, this most ambitious of climbers, this intriguer's intriguer, this dilettante's dilettante, doesn't see that his secret will be pinched from under his nose.

It doesn't take much, just something sufficiently reminiscent of the police, to draw his attention away. In fact, if the incident in the street attracts his attention, it is because he knows himself to be under surveillance from the police – *How come something is going on in front of my house when there are three cops standing at each corner?* Not only has he become feminised through his possession of the letter, but the letter, whose relation to the unconscious I have told you of, even makes him forget the essential. You know the story of the man found on a desert island where he's sought refuge so as to forget – *To forget what? – I've forgotten.* Well then, he has also forgotten that, just the fact of being under surveillance from the police doesn't at all mean that nobody will be able to get the better of you.

The next step is rather odd. How does Dupin behave? Not that there is a long interval between the prefect of police's two visits. As soon as he has the letter, Dupin doesn't breathe a word of it to anyone either. In short, having this letter – this really is the signification of the wandering truth – shuts your trap. And indeed to whom would he have been able to talk about it? He must have been quite encumbered by it.

<sup>6</sup> The puns here are on 'autre' (other) and 'autruche' (ostrich) and 'autrui' (others).

Thank God the prefect of police always returns to the scene of the crime, so the prefect comes round and asks him some questions. The other tells him some absolutely priceless story about free consultations. Someone is trying to sponge information about a prescription from an English doctor – *What would you have directed him to take? – Why, take advice.* That's how Dupin tells the prefect of police that a fee wouldn't be that unwelcome. The good man immediately pays up, and the other says to him – *It's in the drawer there.*

Does this mean that this Dupin, who up until then was an admirable, almost excessively lucid character, has all of a sudden become a small time wheeler and dealer? I don't hesitate to see in this action the re-purchasing of what one could call the bad *mana* attached to the letter. And indeed, from the moment he receives his fee, he has pulled out of the game. It isn't only because he has handed the letter over to another, but because his motives are clear to everyone – he got his money, it's no longer of any concern to him. The sacred value of remuneration of the fee kind is clearly indicated by the context of the medical story.

I don't mean to insist on it, but you might gently point out to me that we, who spend our time being the bearers of all the purloined letters of the patient, also get paid somewhat dearly. Think about this with some care – were we not to be paid, we would get involved in the drama of Atreus and Thyestes, the drama in which all the subjects who come to confide their truth in us are involved. They tell us their damned [*sacre*] stories, and because of that we are not at all within the domain of the sacred and of sacrifice. Everyone knows that money doesn't just buy things, but that the prices which, in our culture, are calculated at rock-bottom, have the function of neutralising something infinitely more dangerous than paying in money, namely owing somebody something.

That is what it is all about. Anyone who has this letter enters into the zone of shadow caused by the fact that it is addressed to whom? if not to whom it may concern – the King. And it will reach him in the end, but not quite the way Dupin tells it in his little imaginary story, in which the minister, following some snub from the Queen, is stupid enough to let the story out. It really does reach the King, a King who still doesn't know anything. But the character of the King has changed in the meanwhile. Having shifted one notch along, and become the Queen, it is now the minister who is the King. In the third stage, he has taken the place of the King, and he has the letter.

It is obviously no longer the letter which passed from Dupin to the prefect of police – and from there into the dark cabinet, for you can't tell us that the odyssey of the letter has come to an end – it is a new form of the letter, which Dupin gave him, far more the instrument of fate than Poe leads us to understand, a provocative form which endows the short story with its cutting and cruel edge, ripe for consumption by *midinettes*. When the minister opens the paper, it is these lines which will forcibly strike him.

. . . un dessein si funeste,  
S'il n'est digne d'Atréé, est digne de Thyste.

And, in this way, if he ever has to open this letter, he would be obliged to submit to the consequences of his own actions, like Thystes to eat his own children. And that, after all, is what we have to deal with every day, each time the line of symbols reaches its terminal point – these are our actions come to search us out. All of a sudden we find ourselves having to pay in full. It is a matter, as they say, of *accounting* for your crimes – which moreover means, that if you know how to account for them, you won't be punished. If he really is mad enough to get out the letter, and especially not to check a bit in advance that it is indeed this letter which is there, all the minister will be capable of doing is to follow the order of the day which I ironically threw out in Zurich, in answer to Leclaire – *Eat your Dasein!* That is Thystes's dish *par excellence*.

The minister would really have had to push the paradox of the gambler to its limit of madness for him to take out the letter. He really would have to be a man without any principles whatsoever, without even this, the last principle, the one which for the most part remains to us, which is simply the shadow of stupidity. If he falls prey to passion, he will find the Queen generous, worthy of respect and love – it's completely ridiculous, but it will save him. If he falls prey to pure and simple hatred, he will try to strike his blow in an efficient manner. It is really only if his *Dasein* has become completely detached from any inscription in any kind of order, including that of intimacy, that of his desk, his table, it is really only if that is the case that he will have to drink the bitter cup to the dregs.

We could write all of this with small *alphas*, *betas*, *gammas*. Everything which could serve to define the characters as real – qualities, temperament, heredity, nobility – has nothing to do with the story. At every moment each of them, even their sexual attitude, is defined by the fact that a letter always reaches its destination.

27 April 1955

## Some questions for the teacher

THE COMMON DISCOURSE  
THE FULFILMENT OF DESIRE<sup>1</sup>  
THE DESIRE TO SLEEP  
THE WORD AND THE GUTS  
THE QUESTION OF REALISM

Today, we are coming close to the top of this sometimes overly steep hill we have been climbing this year. We are approaching a summit. But there's nothing to tell us that we'll have a truly panoramic view from the top over what we've covered.

As I told you last time, I am going to try to knit together the function of speech with that of death – I wouldn't say of death as such, because that doesn't mean anything, but of death in so far as that is what life resists.

The beyond of the pleasure principle is expressed in the word *Wiederholungzwang*. This is incorrectly translated in French by *automatisme de répétition* and I think I am giving you a better rendition with the notion of insistence [*insistance*], repetitive insistence, significant insistence. This function is at the very root of language in so far as a world is a universe subjected to language.

Well then, what is the relation of this function to the notion upon which Freud was led to meditate, also insistently, namely the function of death? For there is a conjunction in the human world between the speech which dominates the destiny of man and death whose position in Freud's thought we are at a loss to locate – does it belong on the level of the real, of the imaginary, or of the symbolic?

But before we tie these two terms together in such a way as to make you once again grasp, and I hope even more firmly, the significance of the Freudian discovery and that of our experience in so far as it enables us to assist the subject in the revelation of himself to himself, I will pause for a moment.

I've had a thought which, however severe it may be, has nothing disillusioned about it. It occurred to me that teaching is something rather problematic, and that from the moment one is led to fill the position which I

<sup>1</sup> 'La réalisation de désir'. This phrase is often taken by Lacan to be the best translation of Freud's 'Wunscherfüllung', translated in SE as 'wish-fulfilment'. At other times, 'réalisation' has been translated as 'realisation'; it should also be borne in mind that puns on 'réalité' and 'réel' are to be found in this connection in this chapter; they will be pointed out as needs be.

occupy behind this little table, there are no examples which reveal one to be inadequate, at least as far as appearances go. In other words, as a rather fine American poet so well observed, you never see a professor be wanting through ignorance. One always knows enough to occupy the minutes while one holds forth in the position of he who knows. You never see anyone dumb-struck, once he's taken up the position of being he who teaches.

This leads me to think that the only genuine teaching is one which succeeds in awakening an insistence in those who are listening, this desire to know which can only emerge when they themselves have taken the measure of ignorance as such – in so far as it is, as such, fruitful – and no less so on the part of the one who teaches.

So before delivering those few words which will appear to be conclusive to those who insist on the formal externals of things, but which for the others will be one more opening – I would like each and every one of you to ask me a question which would be defined as follows, that it be mine.

In other words, let everyone tell me, in his own way, what he thinks I'm trying to get at. Let him tell me, given everything I've said this year, how the question that I have raised, in my own way, has been filled out or closed for him, or has already reached its term, or how he is already resisting it.

This is only a target, and each of you can take up whatever distance you want from this ideal point. It seems to me entirely natural that it be the point of convergence for the questions which come to mind, but nothing obliges you to take that as your aim. Any question you may have to ask me, however seemingly incomplete, parochial, even ill-defined, must nonetheless have some relation to this target.

Moreover, if you think there's something we've been evading, you can use this occasion to say so. This will be yet another way of bringing to mind the continuity as it may have appeared to you along the path on which I've taken you up to now.

I would like you to do it now. That's how it is – I won't allow the seminar hour to be spent any other way than in this very experiment.

We shall proceed by calling for volunteers. This test is truly the least I can ask of you – to speak in front of the others. If, as analysts, you aren't capable of doing that, what can you do?

Those who feel ready to express something they already have on their minds or on the tip of their tongues, do say it right away. This will give the others time to recover.

*the depths, and which would be operative on two fronts, simultaneously against traumas which come from without, and against impulses which come from within. After your lectures, I can no longer think of it like that. And I ask myself which is the better definition. I think that amounts to saying that it is about a fragment of a common discourse. Is that it? Another question. I had also managed to understand why Freud called the source of repetitive symptoms a death instinct. I managed to understand it because this repetition manifests a kind of inertia, and inertia is a return to an inorganic state, hence to the remotest past. I thus understood why Freud could assimilate that to the death instinct. But, after having thought about your last lecture, I realised that these compulsions stem from a kind of indefinite, multiform desire, without any object, a desire for nothing. I understand it very well, but now I no longer understand death.*

It is undoubtedly the case that everything I teach you is intended to put into question the situation of the ego within the topography as it is usually conceived. To install the ego at the centre of the perspective, as is done in the present approach in analysis, is only one of those reversals to which any questioning of the position of man is exposed. Every time there's been a revision of the discourse on man, we have difficulty imagining what happened, because the gist of each of these revisions is always deadened, attenuated, with time, in such a way that today, as always, the word humanism is a bag in which the corpses of these successive disclosures of a revolutionary point of view on man very slowly rot, piled one on top of the other. That is what is now in the process of happening in psychoanalysis.

This reminds me of something I read in the newspaper this morning about one of these displays with which we are now periodically confronted, each time the question of responsibility is raised, on the subject of a crime somewhat lacking in motivation. One witnesses the panicky fear of the psychiatrist, his frantic appeal, his terrified clutching in the face of the thought that, by not underlining the responsibility of the person in question, he himself may once again open up the door on to a general massacre. The former has evidently done something one's not used to seeing, although each moment affords the possibility of it – quite simply by smashing up and repeatedly stabbing, by the side of the road, the person to whom one is tied by the tenderest of bonds. The psychiatrist is all of a sudden confronted with this opening up, this gap, and he is called upon to take sides. This time, something has happened, in the way improbable things do happen, revealing the possibility that it was the luck of the draw. The psychiatrist, who here would have explained to people how saying that the guy is clearly responsible isn't enough to decide the issue, cops out. Then we are treated to a surprising discourse in which the subject makes a wry face as he utters his speech, saying both that the alleged criminal

manifests every possible disturbance of affectivity, lacking contact, he's abominable, but that what he did nonetheless, of course, comes under the common discourse, and that he must suffer the penalty of the law.

We witness something similar in psychoanalysis. The return to the ego as the centre and common measure is not in any way implied by Freud's discourse. Quite the opposite in fact – the further his discourse advances, the further we follow him in the third stage of his work, the more the ego is shown as a mirage, a sum of identifications. Of course the ego is to be found at the rather impoverished point of synthesis to which the subject is reduced when he presents himself, but he is also something else, he also finds himself somewhere else, he comes from somewhere else, precisely from the point beyond the pleasure principle at which we can ask – what is it that is caught in this symbolic web, in this fundamental phrase which insists beyond anything we can catch of the motivation of the subject?

Evidently there is discourse, and, as you put it, common discourse. When I talked about *The Purloined Letter*, I told you, in a way which might have been enigmatic, that this letter, for a time, and within the limits of the short scene, of the *Schauplatz* as Freud puts it, of the Punch and Judy show Poe puts on for us, was the unconscious of the different subjects who succeed each other as its possessors. The letter itself, this phrase written on a piece of paper, in so far as it wanders about, is the unconscious. It is perfectly obvious, once you've seen my demonstration of the successive colourings these subjects acquire as the reflection of the letter shifts across their faces and their social standing.

Perhaps this does not satisfy you. But don't forget that Oedipus's unconscious is in fact that fundamental discourse which accounts for the fact that Oedipus's history has for a long time, forever, been written, accounts for the fact that we know it, and for the fact that Oedipus is totally ignorant of it, despite his having been its plaything from the start. This goes back a long way – remember how the oracle frightens his parents, how he is abandoned, rejected. Everything happens as a function of the oracle and owing to the fact that he really is someone other than what he thinks his history makes him – he is the son of Jocasta and Laius, and he starts life unaware of that. The entire pulsating drama of his destiny depends, from one end to the other, from beginning to end, on this veiling of the discourse, which is the reality of which he is ignorant.

When we come to talk of death again, I will perhaps try and explain to you the end of Oedipus's tragedy, as the great dramatists have portrayed it. You should read *Oedipus at Colonus* for the next seminar. There you'll discover that the final word of the relation of man to this discourse of which he is ignorant, is death. Indeed one must attain poetical expression in order to discover how intense can become the identification between this veiled preterite and death as such, in its most horrible guise. An unveiling which doesn't include a moment

beyond and extinguishes all speech. If the tragedy *Oedipus Rex* is an exemplary work, analysts should also be acquainted with this beyond of the drama realised in the tragedy of *Oedipus at Colonus*.

How should one locate the ego in relation to common discourse and to the beyond of the pleasure principle? That is the question which your point opens up, and I find it very suggestive. In the end, there exists a kind of mirror relation between the subject-individual and the decentred subject, the subject beyond the subject, the subject of the unconscious.

The ego is itself one of the significant elements of ordinary discourse, which is the discourse of the unconscious. As such, and in so far as it is image, it is caught in the chain of symbols. It is an element indispensable to the insertion of the symbolic reality into the reality of the subject, it is tied to the primitive gap of the subject. On account of that, in its original sense, within the psychological life of the human subject it is what appears as closest to, as most intimate with, as on the closest of terms with death.

The relation of the ego to death is an extremely close one, for the ego is a point of intersection between the common discourse, in which the subject finds himself caught, alienated, and his psychological reality.

In man, the imaginary relation has deviated, in so far as that is where the gap is produced whereby death makes itself felt. The world of the symbol, the very foundation of which is the phenomenon of repetitive insistence, is alienating for the subject, or more exactly it causes the subject to always realise himself elsewhere, and causes his truth to be always in some part veiled from him. The ego lies at the intersection of the one and the other.

In the fundamental symbolism we find an inflection towards the imagistic [*image*], towards something which resembles the world or nature, giving the impression that here we have something of the archetypal. By the way, there's no need to say *arche*, it is simply *typical*. But it is more than certain that it has nothing to do with this substantialised thing which Jungian theory offers us under the name of archetype. These archetypes themselves are always symbolised, caught in what you called the common discourse, a fragment of this discourse. I agree – it is a very beautiful definition, and it's a term which I will use, because it is very closely tied to the definition of the ego.

As to your second question, I think last time I got you to realise the difference between insistence and inertia.

To what does resistance correspond in analytic treatment? To something inert. As such, one of its properties is that it doesn't possess in itself any kind of resistance. In the sense of *Widerstand*, an obstacle, an obstacle to an effort, there's no point looking for resistance anywhere else than within ourselves. Whosoever applies force provokes resistance. On the level of inertia, you'll never ever find resistance. Everything connected with transference belongs in a

dimension pertaining to an entirely different register – it belongs to the order of an insistence.

You have also very clearly understood what I wanted to say last time when I invoked desire, desire as revealed by Freud, on the level of the unconscious, as desire for nothing.

Yesterday evening you heard a critique of the illusion, which isn't rare in Freud's readers, that one always finds the same signified, and a signified of rather limited significance, as if the dream's desire designated by Freud in the *Traumdeutung* could in the end be summed up in the form of a list, and a rather short one at that, of drives.

Nothing of the sort is true. I ask you to read the *Traumdeutung* once and for all and in one go so as to be convinced of the contrary. Although Freud there goes over the thousand empirical forms which this desire can acquire, there isn't a single analysis which ends up with the formulation of a desire. Desire is, in the end, never unveiled there. Everything happens on the steps, in the stages, on the different rungs of the revelation of this desire. Freud also somewhere pokes fun at the illusion of those who, having read his *Traumdeutung*, end up thinking that the reality of the dream is the sequence of the dream's latent thoughts. Freud himself says that if that were all it was, this reality would be of no interest. It is the stages of the dream-work which are interesting, for that is where we find revealed what we are looking for in the interpretation of the dream, this x, which in the end is desire for nothing. I defy you to bring me a single passage from the *Traumdeutung* which concludes – this is what the subject desires.

Objection – *What about children's dreams?* That is the only point of misunderstanding in the *Traumdeutung*. I will come back to it, and show you that this point of confusion stems from Freud's inclination, which is the shakiest aspect of his work, to have repeated recourse to a genetic view of things. The objection can be refuted. Fundamentally, when Freud speaks of desire as the mainspring of symbolic formations, from the dream to the joke via all the facts taken from the psychopathology of everyday life, he is always concerned with this moment when what comes into existence via the symbol isn't yet, and hence can in no way be named.

In other words, behind what is named, there is the unnameable. It is in fact because it is unnameable, with all the resonances you can give to this name, that it is akin to the quintessential unnameable, that is to say to death.

Read the *Traumdeutung* again, you'll see it at every step. Everything revealed as nameable is always on the level of the dream-work. This work is a symbolisation, with all its laws, which are those of signification. That was what I was talking about yesterday evening when I mentioned the switch-word, polyvalence, condensation, and all the terms which Freud uses. Its order is always that of overdetermination, or again that of significant

motivation. From the moment when desire has already come into this, when it is caught from end to end in the dialectic of alienation and no longer has any other means of expression than through the desire for recognition and the recognition of desire, how can what hadn't yet been be met again?

Why should it be death? That's what I'll leave as the limit of your question, which proves that you understood what I said.

## 2

M. VALABREGA: *Apropos of what you've just said regarding the dream. Both things are nonetheless true. I think you are right in one way to stress the dream-work.*

Freud does explicitly say that this is the only thing of importance in dreams.

M. VALABREGA: *But even so it isn't the only one, since he also says that the desire is fulfilled in the dream. I think you are right in stressing the work, because it is in the work that one finds the signification of the dream. If that weren't the case, there would be keys to dreams, an idea which Freud has done enough to refute. Nevertheless, the fulfilment of desire mustn't be overlooked. One can find an example of it not only in the dreams of children, but in hallucinatory dreams.*

That is the same question. Do you think you can stick by that?

M. VALABREGA: *No, of course not, when dreams become hallucination, one can't stop there – it is the whole of the work one is led to reconsider, and one has to talk as you do. But one also has to take into consideration the desire to sleep, for which there is a renewed interest today. It is both one of the initial and one of the final motives for the dream. Freud never speaks of secondary work, the only work there is is in the dream in the present, the narrated dream. And then, to terminate, there is the desire to sleep, which is one of the final meanings of the dream. Consequently, the fulfilment of desire at one end, and desire to sleep at the other. I think that more modern interpretations, which are only alluded to in the Traumdeutung, or in other later texts, the interpretation of the desire to sleep as narcissistic desire, clearly tend in this direction. There are two realities in the dream, the fulfilment of desire, which you seem to do away with a little, and the work of signifying.*

You speak of fulfilment of the desire to sleep. To start with I'll go back over the first of these terms.

What can the expression *fulfilment of desire* mean? It seems that you grasped the fact that the fulfilment [réalisation] includes reality [réalité], and consequently here it could only be a question of metaphorical fulfilment. As in any hallucinatory satisfaction, we can here only locate the function of desire in a very problematic form. What is desire, as soon as it is the source of hallucination, of illusion, hence of a satisfaction which is the opposite of a

satisfaction? If we give the term desire a functional definition, if for us it is the tension put into play by the cycle of behavioural fulfilment, whatever that may be, if we include it within a biological cycle, the desire achieves real satisfaction. If it achieves hallucinatory satisfaction, then there is another register here. Desire is satisfied in another fashion than in an effective satisfaction. It is the source, the fundamental means of introduction of a fantasy as such. Here there's another order, which doesn't achieve any objectivity, but which by itself defines the questions raised by the register of the imaginary.

M. VALABREGA: *That is why Freud makes use of the concept of distortion,<sup>2</sup> that is why, immediately after the first proposition, the dream is the fulfilment of a wish [désir], he uses the concept of desire as a distorted fulfilment. That doesn't make it any the less a real [réelle] fulfilment [réalisation], but fulfilled in a distorted form.*

The word distortion is only a metaphor, which leaves open the question of knowing what is satisfied in a symbolic satisfaction. There are indeed desires which will never find any other satisfaction than that of being acknowledged, that is to say avowed. In birds who end up giving up their positions alongside their mates following manoeuvres with an adversary, one can all of a sudden see arise a meticulous grooming of feathers, which is an ectopia of sexual display. In this case, one would speak of throwing another circuit into gear, which might lead to a cycle of resolutions yielding the image of a substitutive satisfaction. Is symbolic satisfaction of the same order? That's the big question. The notion of distortion in no way aids us to grasp it.

As for the other term you brought up just now, the desire to sleep, of course that is extremely important. Freud gave it a special place in connection with secondary revision, in the final chapter of the section on the dream-work, which concerns the intervention in the dream of the *ego* as such.

I think that here there are still two things which one must know how to distinguish. There is the need to maintain sleep for a certain period of time, a need which is supposed to be subjacent to the duration of sleep, directed towards and against all the external or internal stimuli which might disturb it. Does this need appear in the *ego*? Does it partake of the vigilance the latter exercises with the aim of protecting the state of sleep? That is in fact one of the points in the dream where the *ego* makes its presence felt, but is far from being the only one. If you remember the chapter you're referring to, that is where the notion of unconscious fantasy appears for the first time in Freud's thought. Everything pertaining to the register of the *ego* as a vigilant agency occurs on the level of secondary revision, but Freud cannot separate it from the fantasising function in which this *ego* is integrated.

Here we find a whole series, set out with great nuance, of gaugings of the

<sup>2</sup> 'déguisement' 'disguise', corresponding here to 'Entstellung'.

relations so as to distinguish fantasy, dream and day-dreaming, and, in conformity with a kind of mirror relation, at a certain point, there's an exchange of roles. Day-dreaming such as it occurs on the level of the ego is the illusory imaginary satisfaction of desire, it has a very localised function, as Mlle Ramnoux said earlier on, on the surface. What is the relation between this day-dreaming of the ego and another sort, located elsewhere, in tension? This is the first time in Freud's work that the notion of unconscious fantasy appears. This is to show you the complexity of the desire to preserve sleep.

It may be at this level that the game of hide and seek of the ego is most obvious, and finding out where it is presents us with a great number of difficulties. In the end, it is solely at the level of the ego that we come upon the function of day-dreaming in the structuration of dreams. And in addition it is solely when we start with the ego that we extrapolate into thinking that somewhere day-dreaming without ego exists, that unconscious fantasies exist. Paradoxically, the notion of unconscious fantasy, of the activity of fantasy, is supported only by taking a detour via the ego.

### 3

**MME C. AUDRY:** *My question is very similar to that of Clémence Ramnoux, because it also concerns the ego. If the ego is ever a fragment of the common discourse, it is so in analysis. Prior to analysis, it is only a pure, imaginary mirage. From then on, analysis amounts to being a demystification of what was previously imaginary. So we get to the following point – once demystification has been accomplished, we find ourselves in the presence of death. All that is left is to wait and contemplate death. My question may seem overly positivistic or utilitarian but that's how it is.*

Why not? In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus says the following: *Am I made man in the hour when I cease to be?* That is the end of Oedipus's psychoanalysis – the psychoanalysis of Oedipus is only completed at Colonus, when he tears his face apart. That is the essential moment, which gives his story its meaning, and, from the point of view of Oedipus, it is acting-out,<sup>3</sup> and he says as much – *Still, I was angry.*

**MME C. AUDRY:** *Is it between the I cease to be [Je ne suis rien] and death that whatever is capable of being a substitute for humanism must pass?*

Precisely. This 'something different', over many cultures, which renders this word, *humanism*, so difficult to handle.

<sup>3</sup> English in the original.

## 4

M. DURANDIN: *I would like to ask a question, but it isn't very legitimate for me to do so, since I haven't attended your seminars on a regular basis.*

Well, I am going to ask you for some explanations of your *deverbalisation* of yesterday evening.

M. DURANDIN: *There is nothing very difficult in my account of deverbalisation. It has a place, in part, in the immediate givens of consciousness. Language is not only an expression of something which one already knows, it's a mode of communication. It is the instrument in accordance with which the thought of the child is formed. Given the fact that the child lives in society, his carving up of the world is achieved through the intermediary of language, hence verbal realism. One thinks that whenever there's a thing, there must be a word, and if there's no word, there's no thing, and one doesn't take the trouble to look.*

Why don't you fill in what you have just said? Yesterday evening you mentioned the following type of question – did I give that out of generosity or cowardice?

M. DURANDIN: *My patient often puts such questions to me. It isn't possible for me to reply, for the two things he hesitates between are shallow things, which do not correspond to reality. He needs to label whatever he thinks and feels, and, even if it were less shallow, this need to place things and to label them is nonetheless something fixed, half dead. In most cases, these are ready-made thoughts. And to the extent that one obliges a subject to make contact, that one answers him evasively, encouraging him to continue . . .*

You think it's enough to take away his off-the-peg clothes for him to get a made-to-measure suit?

M. DURANDIN: *It isn't enough. But he must be encouraged to see himself naked, to have some self-awareness. That doesn't alter the importance of the speech which comes afterwards. The expression 'deverbalisation' perhaps wasn't a happy one. What seemed important to me was that language is the mould in which our thought, our concepts, our use of the world is formed.*

What you say seems to presuppose that there are two kinds of thought, the one you call *ready made* and one that wouldn't be. And that the essence of thoughts which aren't *ready made* is that they are not just thoughts, but *deverbalised thoughts*. You have taken a conspicuous example from our experience, those questions which the subject asks himself within the register of the psychology of La Rochefoucauld – when I do good, am I doing it for my own glory or for that of a beyond?

M. DURANDIN: *That is indeed the register.*

But why do you think that that is something we should connect with shallow or empty speech? Don't you think that the question remains a perfectly authentic one? You are positioning yourself where La Rochefoucauld placed himself in his register, and it's not for nothing that the ego became such an important issue at that time. Whatever you do, in whatever form you choose to manipulate thought, that is to say, with all due respect, always in a spoken form, the question will retain all of its force. For, in so far as the subject places himself in the register of the ego, everything is indeed dominated by the narcissistic relation. Isn't that what we mean when we say for instance that there is an ineliminable narcissistic dimension in all forms of giving? Do you think that the subject will finally find his way by abandoning the question? How?

M. DURANDIN: *By reformulating it, and by becoming aware of it.*

But how? What have you got in mind as to the manner in which he can reformulate the question?

M. DURANDIN: *If he poses the question in terms of generosity or cowardice, it is probably because he takes the concept seriously, as if they were things.*

He may take them seriously without taking them to be things.

M. DURANDIN: *It isn't very easy.*

What you're saying is true. There is a tendency towards thingification.

M. DURANDIN: *So an exercise in language may be an exercise in the reformulation of thought. Starting with what? Starting with the experience of the fact that one then falls upon things which are a bit mysterious and ineffable. In the end that's reality. One becomes aware of reality by carving it up, by articulating it. But all the same it is something before being named.*

It is unnameable.

M. DURANDIN: *What happens in one's guts is unnameable, but it ends up being named.*

But everything you feel, even in your guts, as you quite rightly say, gives rise to vago-sympathetic reactions only as a function of the chain of questions that you will have introduced. That is what makes you a man. All the peculiarities, the idiosyncrasies, even the rhythm of your vago-sympathetic reactions depends on the way in which questions are introduced in your historicised-historicising story, as soon as you know how to speak. It goes well beyond a strict training.

To evoke a theme often found in Freud, it is as a function of the significant character taken on by the first time you went in your pants, that you will do so

again, at an age it's no longer meant to happen. This letting go was interpreted as a sign, that you lost face or that it was tied to an erotic emotion – take another look at the *Wolfman*. It has acquired value in the phrase, an historic value, a value as symbol, that it may or may not continue to possess. But in every case it is the value that your gut reaction acquired the first time that will be the starting point for the differentiation which will occur on the level of your guts and your digestive tract, and that the chain of causes and effects will evermore be different. If psychoanalysis doesn't teach us that, it doesn't teach us a thing.

In the end, the thought covered by the term *deverbalisation* is the following – the subject's every word only raises false problems. Can we even imagine this idea giving us the solution to what is to be found in the question the subject asks himself? On the contrary, isn't the point to make him understand the extent to which this dialectic of self-love, in this case, has been a part of his discourse up till then? That he is asking his question in an authentic fashion, in so far as his ego plays this role in his relations with other human beings, and it does so because of his history, which must be restored to him in its entirety?

From the position of the obsessional, for instance, everything of the order of the gift is caught in this narcissistic network from which it cannot escape. Doesn't one have to exhaust the dialectic of narcissism right to the very end for him to find the way out? Does one have to force him to beat a retreat in such a way that he never ever articulates another word, or on the contrary should the discourse be pushed to its end in such a way as to take over the whole story? The obsessional's basic story is that he is entirely alienated in a master whose death he awaits, without knowing that he is already dead, in such a way that he can't make a move. Isn't it by making him realise who he is truly the prisoner and slave of, of the dead master, that you can hope for the solution? It isn't by forcing him to abandon his discourse, but by inciting him to follow it through to the terminal stage of its dialectical rigour, that you will be able to get him to understand how he is always frustrated of everything in advance. The more he grants himself things, the more he grants them to the other, to this dead man, and he finds himself eternally deprived of any kind of enjoyment [*jouissance*] in the thing. If he doesn't understand this step, there is no way that you'll ever get yourself out of it.

You tell him that it's a neat cut-out. Then what? Do you think that in itself this philosophy has any cathartic value? Certainly not. Whatever your disdain for the question, you can't help seeing it being perpetually reproduced. There is no reason why the subject should end up without an ego, except in an extreme case such as that of Oedipus at the end of his life.

No one has ever studied the last moments of an obsessional. It would be worthwhile. Maybe at that moment there's a revelation. If you want to procure a somewhat more precocious revelation you certainly won't do so by abandoning speech.

## 5

**M. LEFÈBRE-PONTALIS:** *I sense a certain unease. A lot is said here about the symbolic and the imaginary, but not much is said about the real. And the questions just asked show that we've somewhat lost the real. What Colette Audry said was striking – it was lucky that Oedipus didn't know too soon what he knew only at the end, for he still had to fill out his life. It's all very well seeing how many things which one first took to belong to the real are part of a network, a system with several points of entry, in which I have a place. Where is reality located, if not in the movement between all these dimensions? In other words, the recognition of desire must somehow pass through a certain number of mediations, of avatars, of imaginary formations, of states of being ignorant or of misunderstanding of a symbolic order. Finally, is that what you would call reality?*

Without a doubt. That is what everybody calls reality.

**M. LEFÈBRE-PONTALIS:** *Still, in reality there's something, which isn't like a thing, but like a category, like a norm, something more than there is in other orders. Reality isn't the totality of the symbol.*

I am going to ask you a question. Are you aware how rare it is for love to come to grief on the real qualities or faults of the loved one?

**M. LEFÈBRE-PONTALIS:** *I'm not sure I can answer no. I'm not sure whether that might not be a retrospective illusion.*

I said it was rare. And in fact, when it comes down to it, they appear to be much more like pretexts. One wants to believe that this reality has been touched on.

**M. LEFÈBRE-PONTALIS:** *But that has very great consequences. It amounts to saying that there is no true conception, that one only ever moves from one corrective to the next, from one mirage to the next.*

In fact I do believe that to be the case in the register of intersubjectivity within which our entire experience is to be located. Do we ever reach as simple a real as those limitations of individual capacities which the various psychologies aim to attain?

It isn't in fact that easy to attain, for the domain of the measurable finds its bearings only with great difficulty when it comes to individual qualities, as soon as one locates them at a high enough level, as soon as one tries to discover a certain number of invariable factors – what we call constitutions, temperaments, whereby one tries to qualify individual differences as such. In spite of it all, I wouldn't say that spontaneous psychology is stricken with a basic impotence, since everyone, in so far as he is psychologically astute, gives marks to his contemporaries, and experience shows that he is quite capable of

doing so. One does in fact get somewhere by asking a group of people about a given individual, and in asking each of them to give him a mark for this or that quality of his or this or that alleged defect of his.

I am therefore not trying to render the approach to the real through intersubjectivity fundamentally null and void. But in the end, the human drama as such is located outside the domain of such appraisals. Each person's drama, what each of us has to deal with, which produces certain effects, sometimes pathological, sometimes simply alienating, is of an entirely different order from these appraisals of the real, though they have their utility.

So I don't question the existence of the real. There are all kinds of real limitations. It is undoubtedly true that I can't lift this table with one hand, there are all kinds of things that can be measured.

M. LÈFÈVRE-PONTALIS: *You only see the real under its aspect of adversity, as what resists, what is troublesome.*

It doesn't trouble me that I can't lift this table, it forces me to take a detour, that's obvious, but it doesn't trouble me to take a detour – I don't think that that is the meaning of what I teach you when I distinguish the symbolic, the imaginary and the real.

The essential part of human experience, that which is properly speaking the experience of the subject, that which causes the subject to exist, is to be located on the level of the emergence of the symbolic. To use a word which has resonances in the development of scientific thought, Baconian resonances, tables of presence, it never occurs to one that these assume the emergence of an entirely different dimension from that of the real. What you connote as presence is placed at the root of its possible inexistence. I am presenting the idea I'm putting forward here in a perceivable form, since I'm replying to someone who's putting the question of realism to me, someone who is a long way from being an idealist. There is no question of saying that the real didn't exist beforehand. But nothing that is effective in the domain of the subject emerges out of it. In so far as the subject exists, in so far as he sustains his existence, in so far as he raises the question of his existence, this subject with whom you are in dialogue in analysis and whom you cure through the art of speech, his essential reality consists in the junction of reality and the appearance of tables of presence. That doesn't mean that it's him who creates them all. What I'm going blue in the face telling you is precisely that they are already made. The game is already played, the die already cast. It is already cast, with the following proviso, that we can pick it up again, and throw it anew. The game has been going on a long time. Everything I'm showing you is already part of a story concerning which one can pronounce every possible and imaginable oracle. That is why the Augurs can't look each other in the face without laughing. It isn't because they tell each other – *You're having them on.* If Tiresias encounters

another Tiresias, he laughs. But in fact he can't encounter another, because he is blind, and not without reason. Don't you feel there's something derisory and funny about the fact that the die has already been cast?

M. LEFÈVRE-PONTALIS: *That doesn't answer my question.*

We are reconsidering it. But what is striking is the extent to which a vacillation – quite apparent, because on the contrary it allows things to conserve a remarkable stability, somewhere other than where you are accustomed to find it – a certain vacillation in the usual relations of the symbol and the real can throw you into considerable disarray. To be quite candid, if I had to sum you up – I'm not talking about you personally, but about people of your generation – I'd say what strikes me is the number of things they believe in.

I have found a very odd ordinance from 1277 for you to use. In those days of faith and darkness, they were forced to curb those who, on the forms at school, in the Sorbonne and elsewhere, openly blasphemed the name of Jesus or Mary during mass. That's not done any more – it would not occur to you to blaspheme against Jesus and Mary. But I've known highly surrealist people who would rather be hung than publish a poem blaspheming the Virgin, because they thought that, after all, something just might happen to them.

The most severe punishments were decreed for those who played dice at the altar during the Holy Sacrament. Such things seem to me to indicate the existence of a working dimension which is singularly lacking in our time.

It is not for nothing that I am telling you about dice and making you play the game of even and odd. Without the shadow of a doubt, there's something rather scandalous about playing a game of dice on the altar, and all the more so during the Holy Sacrament. But I think that the fact that it is possible should restore to you the sense of a capacity which has been far more obliterated than one thinks in the circles we frequent. It is simply what is called the possibility of criticism.

11 May 1955

# XVIII

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## Desire, life and death

THE LIBIDO  
DESIRE, SEXUAL DESIRE, INSTINCT  
RESISTANCE OF THE ANALYST  
THE BEYOND OF OEDIPUS  
LIFE DREAMS ONLY OF DYING

Today we are going to make some headway with the question of the relations between the Freudian notion of the death instinct and what I have called significant insistence.

The questions you asked me last time don't seem to me to have been misguided – they all bore on very sensitive issues. The remainder of our path will take us to some answers to a number of them, and I will try not to forget to point that out to you as we go along.

We have reached a radical crossroads in the Freudian position. At this point, one can almost say anything. But this anything isn't just anything, in the sense that whatever one may say, it will always be rigorous to those who know how to listen.

Indeed the point we're getting to is none other than desire and whatever can be said about it on the basis of our experience – an anthropology? a cosmology? There's no word for it.

Even though this is the central point Freud is asking us to understand in the phenomenon of mental illness, it is something which in itself is so subversive that all one cares about is to distance oneself from it.

### 1

In order to talk about desire, one notion in particular came to the fore, the libido. Is what this notion implies adequate to the level on which your action takes place, namely that of speech?

Libido allows one to speak of desire in terms which involve a relative objectification. It is, if you wish, a unit of quantitative measurement. A quantity which you don't know how to measure, whose nature you don't know, but which you always assume to be there. This quantitative notion allows you to unify the variation in qualitative effects, and gives some coherence to the manner in which they succeed one another.

Let us be clear as to what is meant by *qualitative effects*. There are states, changes of state. To explain the order in which they occur and their transformations, you more or less implicitly have recourse to the notion of a threshold, and by the same token to that of a level and of invariability. You assume an undifferentiated quantitative unit susceptible of entering into relations of equivalence. If it can't be discharged, can't expand as normal, can't spread out, overflows occur from which other states ensue. Hence one would talk of transformations, regressions, fixations, sublimations of the libido, a single term which is conceived of quantitatively.

The notion of libido emerged only gradually out of the Freudian experience, and it didn't have this extended use at the beginning. But as soon as it makes its appearance, that is in the *Three Essays*, it already has the function of unifying the different structures of the phases of sexuality. Do note that, although this work dates from 1905, the part which concerns the libido dates from 1915, that is to say the period, more or less, when the theory of phases was becoming extremely complicated, with the introduction of narcissistic investments.

So the notion of libido is a form of unification for the domain of psychoanalytical effects. I would now like to draw your attention to the fact that its use falls within the traditional scope of any and every theory, tending to end up with a world, the *terminus ad quem* of classical physics, or a unitary domain, the ideal of Einsteinian physics. We aren't in a position to align our poor little domain with the universal domain of physics, but the libido partakes of the same ideal.

It's not for nothing that this unitary domain is called *theoretical* – it is the ideal and unique subject of a *theoria*, an intuition, indeed contemplation, the exhaustive knowledge of which we assume would allow us to give an account of its entire past no less than its entire future. It is clear that none of this affords any place to what would be the realisation of anything new, a *Wirken*, an action, properly speaking.

Nothing could be further removed from the Freudian experience.

The Freudian experience starts from an exactly contrary notion of the theoretical perspective. It starts by postulating a world of desire. It postulates it prior to any kind of experience, prior to any considerations concerning the world of appearances and the world of essences. Desire is constituted within the Freudian world in which our experience unfolds, it constitutes it, and at no point in time, not even in the most insignificant of our manoeuvres in this experience of ours, can it be erased.

The Freudian world isn't a world of things, it isn't a world of being, it is a world of desire as such.

This famous object relation, which we are gargling with these days, has a tendency to be employed as a model, a pattern<sup>1</sup> of the adaptation of the subject

<sup>1</sup> English in the original.

to its normal objects. However, this term, in so far as it can be of use in the experience of analysis, can only acquire a meaning from ideas concerning the evolution of the libido, the pregenital stage, the genital stage. Can one say that the structure, the maturity, the fully-fledged realisation of the object depends on the libido? At the genital stage, the libido is thought to bring a new object, another structuration, another sort of existence for the object into the world, bringing its fullness, its maturity to completion. And this has nothing to do with traditional aspects of the theory of man's relations to the world – the opposition of being to appearance.

Within the classical, theoretical perspective, between subject and object there is coaptation, *co-naissance*<sup>2</sup> – a play on words retaining all its force, for the theory of knowledge lies at the heart of any discussion of the relation of man to the world. The subject has to place himself in adequation with the thing, in a relation of being to being – the relation of a subjective being, but one that is truly real, of a being aware of being, to a being one knows to be.

The domain of the Freudian experience is established within a very different register of relations. Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists.

This lack is beyond anything which can represent it. It is only ever represented as a reflection on a veil. The libido, but now no longer as used theoretically as a quantitative quantity, is the name of what animates the deep-seated conflict at the heart of human action.

We necessarily believe that, at the centre, things are really there, solid, established, waiting to be recognised, and that the conflict is marginal. But what does the Freudian experience teach us? If not that what happens in the domain of so-called consciousness, that is on the level of the recognition of objects, is equally misleading in relation to what the being is looking for? In so far as the libido creates the different stages of the object, the objects are never it<sup>3</sup> – except from the moment when that would be *entirely* it, thanks to a genital maturation of the libido, the experience of which in analysis retains a character which is, there is no denying it, ineffable, since as soon as one wants to spell it out, one ends up in all sorts of contradictions, including the impasse of narcissism.

Desire, a function central to all human experience, is the desire for nothing nameable. And at the same time this desire lies at the origin of every variety of animation. If being were only what it is, there wouldn't even be room to talk about it. Being comes into existence as an exact function of this lack. Being attains a sense of self in relation to being as a function of this lack, in the

<sup>2</sup> The pun is on *connaissance* (knowledge, acquaintance) and *co-naissance* (a neologism of *co-*(with) and *naissance* (birth)).

<sup>3</sup> *ça* – the standard French translation of *das Es* (the id).

experience of desire. In the pursuit of this beyond, which is nothing, it harks back to the feeling of a being with self-consciousness, which is nothing but its own reflection in the world of things. For it is the companion of beings there before it, who do not in fact know themselves.

The self-conscious being, transparent to itself, which classical theory places at the centre of human experience, appears, from this perspective, as a manner of locating, in the world of objects, this being of desire who cannot perceive itself as such, except in its lack. If this lack of being, it perceived that it is lacking being, and that the being is there, in all the things which do not know themselves to be. And it imagines itself, for its part, as one more object, for it sees no other difference. It says – *I'm the one who knows that I am*. Unfortunately, if it does perhaps know that it is, it knows nothing at all about what it is. That is what is lacking in every being.

In short, there is a confusion between the capacity to erect a fundamental distress whereby being arises as presence from a background of absence, and what we commonly call the capacity for consciousness, for becoming aware, which is only a neutral and abstract, and even abstracted, form of the totality of the possible mirages.

Relations between human beings are really established before one gets to the domain of consciousness. It is desire which achieves the primitive structuration of the human world, desire as unconscious. In this respect, we must appraise Freud's advance.

*Copernican revolution*, when it comes down to it, is, as you can see, a crass metaphor. It goes without saying that Copernicus produced a revolution, but in the world of determined and determinable things. Freud's advance constitutes, I would say, a revolution in an opposite direction, because before Copernicus, the world owed its structure precisely to the fact that so much of man was already in it. And to tell the truth, we've never really decanted it completely, although we've done enough.

Freud's advance isn't to be explained by the basic and precarious experience of the fact of having to care for someone, it really is the correlate of a revolution carried through over the entire domain constituted by man's thinking concerning himself and his experience; over the entire domain of philosophy – since after all we must give it its name.

This revolution brings man back into the world as creator. But the latter risks being entirely dispossessed of his creation by the simple trick, always put on one side in classical theory, which consists in saying – *God is no deceiver*.

That is so essential that, when it came to it, Einstein got stuck at the same point as Descartes. The Lord, he used to say, is certainly a crafty fellow, but he isn't dishonest. It was essential to his organisation of the world that God not be a deceiver. But this, precisely, is what we don't know.

The decisive element of the Freudian experience could be summed up as

follows – don't forget that consciousness isn't universal. Modern experience awoke from a long fascination with the property of consciousness, and considers man's experience within its own structure, which is the structure of desire. That is the only starting-point for explaining the fact that there are men. Not men as a herd, but men who speak, with this speech through which something is introduced into the world which weighs as heavily as the whole of the real.

There is a fundamental ambiguity in the use we make of the word 'desire'. Sometimes we objectify it – and we have to do so, if only to talk about it. On the contrary, sometimes we locate it as the primitive term in relation to any objectification.

In fact, sexual desire in our experience has nothing objectified about it. It is neither an abstraction, nor a purified  $x$ , as the notion of force in physics has become. Doubtless we make use of it, and it's very handy, for describing a certain biological cycle, or more precisely a certain number of cycles which are more or less tied up with biological systems. But what we have to deal with is a subject which is here, who truly is desiring, and the desire in question is prior to any kind of conceptualisation – every conceptualisation stems from it. The proof that analysis does indeed lead to our approaching things this way is that the largest part of what the subject takes to be a certainty after due reflection is for us only the superficial, rationalised, subsequently justified ordering of what his desire foments, which gives his world and his action its essential curvature.

If we were to operate in the world of science, if it were sufficient to change the objective conditions in order to obtain different effects, if sexual desire followed objectified cycles, we would end up abandoning analysis. How could sexual desire thus defined be influenced by the experience of speech – except by adopting magical thinking?

It isn't Freud who discovered that the libido is the determining factor in human behaviour. Aristotle was already offering a theory of hysteria based on the fact that the uterus is a small animal which lives inside the woman's body, and which moved about bloody violently when it wasn't given something to tuck into. Obviously he used this example because he didn't want to take a far more obvious one, the male sexual organ, for which you don't need any sort of theoretician to remind you of its surgings.

Except Aristotle never thought matters would be helped by having conversations with the little animal inside the woman's belly. In other words, to speak like a chansonnier who, in his obscenity, was infected from time to time with a kind of sacred fury [*sureur*] verging on prophecy<sup>4</sup> – *ça ne mange pas de pain, ça ne parle pas non plus, et puis ça n'entend rien* [it doesn't take up space, nor does it talk, neither does it hear]. It is not open to reason. If the experience of

<sup>4</sup> An implicit reference to the French idiomatic phrase, '*chanson qui fait sureur*' (a song which is all the rage).

speech has an effect under these circumstances, it is because we are somewhere other than Aristotle.

Of course, the desire we deal with in analysis isn't totally unrelated to this desire.

Given the level at which desire is to be found in the Freudian experience, why are we nonetheless called upon to embody it in this desire?

## 2

You tell me, my dear Valabrega, that there's a kind of satisfaction of desire in dreams. I assume that you are thinking of children's dreams, as indeed about every kind of hallucinatory satisfaction of desire.

But what does Freud tell us? It is true, in the child there's no distortion of desire, during the day he wants cherries and he dreams of cherries. Except, Freud nonetheless emphasises that, even at this infantile stage, the desire of the dream as of the symptom is a sexual desire. He is adamant about that.

Look at the *Wolfman*. With Jung, the libido gets drowned in the concerns of the soul, the great dreamer, the centre of the world, the ethereal embodiment of the subject. Freud is categorically opposed to that, and moreover at an extremely delicate moment in time, when he is tempted to give in to Jungian reductionism, since at that point he realises that the perspective of the past of the subject may well only be fantasy. The door is open to pass from the notion of desire which is directed towards, which is captivated by, mirages, to the notion of the universal mirage. It isn't the same thing.

The full signification of the fact that Freud retains the term 'sexual desire' every time desire is at issue can be seen in those cases when something else clearly seems to be involved, the hallucination of needs for instance. It all seems entirely natural – why wouldn't needs be hallucinated? It's so much easier to believe on account of there being a kind of mirage at the second level, called mirage of the mirage. Since we experience the mirage, its presence is entirely natural. But once you start thinking, you ought to be astonished by the existence of mirages, and not only by what they show us.

We never stop long enough to consider the hallucination of the child's dream or the dream of the starving. We don't notice one fine detail, which is that when the child wanted cherries during the day, she doesn't dream only of cherries. To cite the young Anna Freud, since the dream is hers, with her baby talk in which certain consonants are missing, she also dreams of custard, of cake, just as the person starving to death doesn't dream of the hunk of bread and glass of water which would sate him, rather he dreams of Pantagruelian meals.

O. MANNONI: *The dream about the cherries and the one about the cake aren't the same.*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See GW II/III 135; Stud II 148; SE IV 130.

The desire at issue, even the one that is said to be distorted, is already beyond the coaptation of need. Even the simplest of desires is very problematic.

O. MANNONI: *The desire isn't the same, since she recounts her dream.*

I'm very much aware that you have an admirable understanding of what I'm saying. Of course, that's what it's really about, but that isn't clear to everyone, and I'm trying to bring the evidence to bear just where it can reach the greatest number of people. Let me stick to the level I'm working on.

In the end, at this existential level, we can only talk about the libido satisfactorily in a mythical way – it is the *genitrix, hominum divumque voluptas*.<sup>6</sup> That is what Freud is getting at. In former days what returns here used to be expressed in terms of the gods, and one must proceed with care before turning it into an algebraic sign. They're extremely useful, algebraic signs, but on condition that you restore their dimensions to them. That is what I am trying to do when I talk to you about machines.

When does Freud tell us about a beyond of the pleasure principle? Just when the analysts have taken the path Freud taught them, and think they know. Freud tells them that desire is sexual desire, and they believe it. That is precisely where they err – for they don't understand what that means.

Why for most of the time is desire something other than what it appears to be? Why is that what Freud calls sexual desire? The reason for it remains concealed, just as concealed as the beyond which the one who experiences the sexual desire looks for behind an experience subjected to all the lures in nature as a whole.

If there's something which shows, not only in ordinary experience, but in experiments, the efficacy of the lure in animal behaviour, that something is sexual experience. There's nothing easier than fooling an animal about the qualities which turn an object, of whatever appearance, into the thing towards which he'll advance as if towards his partner. The captivating *Gestalten*, the innate releasing mechanisms are inscribed in the register of parade and pairing.

When Freud maintains that sexual desire is the heart of human desire, all those who follow him believe it, believe it so strongly that they manage to persuade themselves that it is all very simple, and that all that's left to do is to turn it into a science, the science of sexual desire, a constant force. All it takes is to remove the obstacles, and it will work all by itself. All it takes is to tell the patient – you don't realise it, but the object is here. That is at first sight what an interpretation seems to be like.

Except it doesn't work. This is when – and this is the turning-point – it is said that the subject resists. Why do we say that? Because Freud also said it. But we haven't understood what *resisting* means any more than we have understood *sexual desire*. We think that we should press on. And that is when the analyst

<sup>6</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, line 1 – 'progenitor, object of ecstasy of men and gods'.

himself succumbs to the lure. I showed you what the insistence on the side of the suffering patient means. Well then, the analyst places himself at the same level, he insists in his own way, an obviously far more stupid way, since it is conscious.

In the perspective which I'm opening up for you, it's you who provoke resistance. In the sense in which you understand resistance, that is a resistance which resists, it only resists because that's where you're pushing. There is no resistance on the part of the subject. What's at stake is delivering the insistence that is to be found in the symptom. What Freud himself calls *inertia* in this context isn't a resistance – like any kind of inertia, it is a kind of ideal point. It's you who presuppose it, in order to understand what's happening. You aren't wrong so long as you don't forget that it is your hypothesis. It simply means that there's a process, and that in order to understand it you imagine a zero point. Resistance only starts once you try to make the subject move on from this point.

In other words, resistance is the present state of an interpretation of the subject. It is the manner in which, at the same time, the subject interprets the point he's got to. This resistance is an abstract ideal point. It is you who call it resistance. It simply means that he cannot move any faster, and you have no say in the matter. The subject is where he is at. The question is one of knowing whether or not he is making progress. It is clear that he has no inclination whatsoever to move on, but however little he speaks, however little value what he says might have, what he says is his interpretation of the moment, and the rest of what he says is the totality of his successive interpretations. Properly speaking, resistance is an abstraction which you locate inside so as to find your way around. You introduce the idea of a deadlock, which you call resistance, and of a force, which makes it move on. Up to that point, that is entirely correct. But if you invariably then resort to the idea that resistance is to be *liquidated*, as is written all over the place, you are ending up with pure, unqualified absurdity. Having created an abstraction, you say – *we have to make this abstraction disappear, there mustn't be any inertia*.

There is only one resistance, the resistance of the analyst. The analyst resists when he doesn't understand what he is dealing with. He doesn't understand what he is dealing with when he thinks that interpreting is showing the subject that what he desires is this particular sexual object. He's mistaken. What he here takes to be objective is just a pure and simple abstraction. He's the one who's in a state of inertia and of resistance.

In contrast, what's important is to teach the subject to name, to articulate, to bring this desire into existence, this desire which, quite literally, is on this side of existence, which is why it insists. If desire doesn't dare to speak its name, it's because the subject hasn't yet caused this name to come forth.

That the subject should come to recognise and to name his desire, that is the

efficacious action of analysis. But it isn't a question of recognising something which would be entirely given, ready to be coopted. In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world. He introduces presence as such, and by the same token, hollows out absence as such. It is only at this level that one can conceive of the action of interpretation.

Since we're always engaged in a balancing-act between Freud's text and experience, go back to the text, to see how *Beyond* really does locate desire beyond any instinctual cycle definable by its conditions.

### 3

To fill in what I am in the middle of articulating for you, I told you that we had an example, which I took because I happened to come across it – the example of Oedipus finding his end, the beyond of Oedipus.

The fact that Oedipus is the patronymic hero of the Oedipus complex isn't a coincidence. Another one could have been chosen, since all the heroes of Greek mythology have some sort of connection with this myth, they embody it under different guises, reveal other aspects of it. There was certainly a reason why Freud was guided towards this one.

Throughout his life, Oedipus is always this myth. He is himself nothing other than the passage from myth to existence. Whether he existed or not is of little importance to us, since he exists in each of us, in a palely reflected form, he is ubiquitous, and he exists far more than if he really had existed.

One can say that a thing does or doesn't *really* exist. On the other hand, I was surprised to see, regarding the archetypal cure, one of our colleagues oppose the term *psychic reality* to that of *true reality*. I think that I have put you all in enough of a state of suggestion for this term to seem to you a contradiction *in adjecto*.

Whether a thing *really* exists or not doesn't much matter. It can perfectly easily exist in the full sense of the term, even if it doesn't really exist. By definition, there is something so improbable about all existence that one is in effect perpetually questioning oneself about its reality.

So Oedipus does exist, and he fully realised his destiny. He realised it to that final point which is nothing more than something strictly identical to a striking down, a tearing apart, a laceration of himself – he is no longer, no longer anything, at all. And it is at that moment that he says the phrase I evoked last time – *Am I made man in the hour when I cease to be?*

I've torn this phrase out of its context, and I must put it back there so that you avoid acquiring the illusion that, for instance, the term of man would at this moment have some sort of significance. In all strictness, it has none, precisely in as much as Oedipus achieved the full realisation of the speech of the oracles which already named his destiny even before he was born. Before his birth his

parents were told those things which required that he be hurled towards his destiny, that is that no sooner was he born, he be exposed hung by a foot. It is with this initial act that he begins to realise his destiny. So everything is written from the start, and unfolds right up to its final end, including the fact that Oedipus assumes it through his own action. *I, he says, have nothing to do with it. The people of Thebes, in their exaltation, gave me this woman as reward for having delivered them from the Sphinx, and this guy, I didn't know who he was, I beat him up, he was old, I can't help it, I hit him a bit hard, it has to be said I was quite a guy.*

He accepts his destiny at the moment when he mutilates himself, but he had already accepted it at the moment when he accepted the crown. It is when he is king that he draws down all the maledictions on the city, and that there is an order of the gods, a law of retributions and punishments. It is quite natural for everything to come down on Oedipus since he is the central knot of speech. The question is whether he will accept it or not. He thinks that, after all, he is innocent, but he fully accepts it since he tears himself apart. And he asks to be allowed to sit at Colonus, in the sacred precinct of the Eumenides. He thus fulfils the prophecy [*parole*] down to the last detail.

Meanwhile, people in Thebes continue to gossip. The people of Thebes are told – *Just a minute! You pushed it a bit far. It was all very well for Oedipus to mortify himself. Except, you found him disgusting and you drove him away. Now, the future of Thebes hangs precisely on this embodied speech which you couldn't recognise when it was here, with its ensuing tearing, cancelling of man. You exiled him. Thebes beware – if you don't bring him back, if not within the limits of your land, at least nearby, so that he doesn't slip away from you. If the speech which is his destiny begins to wander, it will take with it your destiny as well. Athens will reap the harvest of true existence which he embodies, and she will secure every advantage over you and will have every triumph.*

They run after him. Hearing that he is about to receive some visit, all kinds of ambassadors, wise men, politicians, enthusiasts, his son, Oedipus then says – *Am I made man in the hour when I cease to be?*

That is where beyond the pleasure principle begins. When the oracle's prophecy [*parole*] is entirely fulfilled, when the life of Oedipus has completely passed over into his destiny, what remains of Oedipus? That is what *Oedipus at Colonus* shows us – the essential drama of destiny, the total absence of charity, of fraternity, of anything whatsoever relating to what one calls human feeling.

What does the theme of *Oedipus at Colonus* amount to? The chorus says – *Say what you will, the greatest boon is not to be;/ But, life begun, soonest to end is best, . . .* And Oedipus calls down the most extreme maledictions upon posterity and the city for which he was a burnt offering – read the maledictions addressed to his son, Polynices.

And then, there is the negation of the prophecy [*parole*], which takes place within the precinct, upon whose borders the whole drama takes place, the

precinct in the place where it is forbidden to speak, the central point where silence is obligatory, for there live avenging goddesses, who do not forgive and who catch hold of the human being at every opportunity. You get Oedipus to come out of there each time you want to get a few words from him, for if he says them in that place, something awful will happen.

The sacred always has its *raisons d'être*. Why is there always somewhere where speech peters out? Perhaps so that it subsists in this precinct.

What happens at that moment? The death of Oedipus. It comes about under extremely peculiar circumstances. Someone whose gaze, from afar, has followed the two men as they go towards the centre of the sacred place, turns around, and sees only one of the two men, hiding his face with his arm in an attitude of sacred awe. You have the feeling that it isn't very pretty to look at, a kind of volatilisation of the presence of one who has said his last words. I think that *Oedipus at Colonus* here is alluding to some unknown thing which was revealed in the mysteries, which are here always in the background. But for us, if I wanted to picture it, I would look for it yet again in Edgar Poe.

Edgar Poe always juxtaposed the themes of life and of death, in a way not lacking in significance. As an echo of this liquification of Oedipus, I would choose *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*.

It's about an experiment in the sustentation of the subject in speech, by means of what was then called magnetism, a form of theorisation of hypnosis – someone in *articulo mortis* is hypnotised to see what will happen. A man at the end of his life is chosen, he only has some few breaths left, and in every other way he's dying. It's been explained to him that if he wants to become one of humanity's heroes, he has only to signal to the hypnotiser. If this could be set up in the few hours preceding his last breath, one would find out. This is fine poetical imagination, which ranges much further than our timid medical imaginations, although we all try hard along that road.

In fact, the subject passes from life into death, and remains for some months in a state of sufficient aggregation to be still in fair condition – a corpse on a bed, which, from time to time, speaks, saying *I am dead*.

This state of affairs is maintained, with the help of all kinds of tricks and digs in the ribs, until the passes contrary to those that put him to sleep are started in order to wake him up, when several screams from the poor wretch are heard – *For God's sake! – quick! – quick! – put me to sleep – or, quick! – waken me! – quick! – I SAY TO YOU THAT I AM DEAD!*

He's already been saying he's dead for six months, but when he is awakened, M. Valdemar is no more than a disgusting liquefaction, something for which no language has a name, the naked apparition, pure, simple, brutal, of this figure which it is impossible to gaze at face on, which hovers in the background of all the imaginings of human destiny, which is beyond all qualification, and for which the word carrion is completely inadequate, the complete collapse of this

species of swelling that is life – the bubble bursts and dissolves down into inanimate putrid liquid.

That is what happens in the case of Oedipus. As everything right from the start of the tragedy goes to show, Oedipus is nothing more than the scum of the earth, the refuse, the residue, a thing empty of any plausible appearance.

*Oedipus at Colonus*, whose being lies entirely within the word [*parole*] proffered by his destiny, makes actual the conjunction of death and life. He lives a life which is dead, which is that death which is precisely there under life. That is also where Freud's lengthy text leads us, where he tells us – *Don't believe that life is an exalting goddess who has arisen to culminate in that most beautiful of forms, that there is the slightest power of achievement and progress in life. Life is a blister, a mould, characterised – as others besides Freud have written – by nothing beyond its aptitude for death.*

That is what life is – a detour, a dogged detour, in itself transitory and precarious, and deprived of any significance. Why, in that of its manifestations called man, does something happen, which insists throughout this life, which is called a meaning? We call it *human*, but are we so sure? Is this meaning as human as all that? A meaning is an order, that is to say, a sudden emergence. A meaning is an order which suddenly emerges. A life insists on entering into it, but it expresses something which is perhaps completely beyond this life, since when we get to the root of this life, behind the drama of the passage into existence, we find nothing besides life conjoined to death. That is where the Freudian dialectic leads us.

Up to a certain point, Freudian theory may seem to explain everything, including what's related to death, within the framework of a closed libidinal economy, regulated by the pleasure principle and a return to equilibrium, involving specific relations between objects. The merging of the libido with activities which on the surface are at odds with it, aggressivity for instance, is put down to imaginary identification. Instead of beating up the other confronting him, the subject identifies himself, and turns against himself this gentle aggressivity, which is thought of as a libidinal object relation, and is founded upon what are called the instincts of the ego, that is to say the need for order and harmony. After all, one must eat – when the pantry is empty, one tucks into one's fellow being [*semblable*]. The libidinal adventure is here objectified in the order of living things, and one assumes that the behaviour of subjects, their inter-aggressivity, is conditioned and capable of explication by a desire which is fundamentally adequate to its object.

The significance of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that that isn't enough. Masochism is not inverted sadism, the phenomenon of aggressivity isn't to be explained simply on the level of imaginary identification. What Freud's primary masochism teaches us is that, when life has been dispossessed of its speech, its final word can only be the final malediction expressed at the end of

*Oedipus at Colonus*. Life doesn't want to be healed. The negative therapeutic reaction is fundamental to it. Anyway, what is healing? The realisation of the subject through a speech which comes from elsewhere, traversing it.

This life we're captive of, this essentially alienated life, ex-existing, this life in the other, is as such joined to death, it always returns to death, and is only drawn into increasingly large and more roundabout circuits by what Freud calls the elements of the external world.

All that life is concerned with is seeking repose as much as possible while awaiting death. That is what devours the time of the suckling baby at the beginning of its existence, with hourly segments which allow him just to take a peep from time to time. You have to try bloody hard to draw him out of this for him to find the rhythm by which we get attuned to the world. If the nameless desire can appear at the level of the desire to sleep, which you mentioned the other day, Valabrega, that's because it is in an intermediary state – dozing off is the most natural of all vital states. Life is concerned solely with dying – *To die, to sleep, perchance to dream*, as a certain gentleman put it, just when what was at issue was exactly that – to be or not to be.<sup>7</sup>

## 4

This *to be or not to be*<sup>7</sup> is an entirely verbal story. A very funny comedian tried showing how Shakespeare came upon it, scratching his head – *to be or not . . .*, and he would start again – *to be or not . . . to be*. If that's funny, that's because this moment is when the entire dimension of language comes into focus. The dream and the joke emerge on the same level.

Take this sentence, which is obviously not very funny – *The greatest boon is not to be*.<sup>8</sup> It is quite striking to realise that for the greatest tragedian of Antiquity, this was to be found in a religious ceremony. Can you imagine that being said during mass! The comics took it upon themselves to make us laugh at it. *It would be better not to be born* – *Unfortunately, replies the other, that happens to scarcely one in a hundred thousand*.<sup>9</sup>

Why's this witty?

To begin with, because it plays on words, an indispensable technical element. *It would be better not to be born*. Of course! This means that here there's an unthinkable unity, about which absolutely nothing can be said before it comes into existence, from which time it may indeed insist, but one could imagine it not insisting, so that everything passes into the universal rest and silence of the stars, as Pascal puts it. That is true enough, it may be so at the moment when one says it, *it would be better not to be born*. What is ridiculous is

<sup>7</sup> English in the original.

<sup>8</sup> The French version of the Greek that Lacan uses, literally translated: 'It would be better not to be born.' Without the reference to birth, the connection with the joke cited by Freud that follows is lost. <sup>9</sup> See (1905c) GW VI 60; Stud IV 57–8; SE VIII 57.

saying it, and entering into the order of the calculus of probabilities. Wit is only wit because it is close enough to our existence to cancel it with laughter. The phenomena of the dream, of the psychopathology of everyday life, of the joke are to be found in this zone.

You must read *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. Freud's rigour is stupefying, but he doesn't quite give the last word, namely that everything relating to wit takes place on the vacillating level of speech. If it weren't there, nothing would exist.

Take the silliest story, the man in a bakery, who pretends he's got nothing to pay for – he held out his hand and asked for a cake, he gives the cake back and asks for a glass of liqueur, drinks it, he's asked to pay for the glass of liqueur and he replies – *But I gave you the cake in exchange for it.* – *But you haven't paid for the cake either* – *But I hadn't eaten it.*<sup>10</sup> There was an exchange. But how did the exchange begin? At some point, something must have entered the circle of exchange. So the exchange must have already been set up. That is to say that when all is said and done, one is always left paying for the small glass of liqueur with a cake one hasn't paid for.

The absolutely sublime marriage-broker stories are also funny for the same reason. '*The one you introduced me to has an unbearable mother.*' – '*Listen, you're marrying the daughter, not the mother.*' – '*But she isn't exactly pretty, nor a spring chicken.*' – '*She'll be all the more faithful for it.*' – '*But she hasn't got much money.*' – '*You can't expect everything.*'<sup>11</sup> And so on. The conjoiner, the marriage-broker, conjoins on a completely different plane than that of reality, since the plane of an engagement, of love, has nothing to do with reality. By definition, the marriage-broker, paid to deceive, can never fall into crass realities.

Desire always becomes manifest at the joint of speech, where it makes its appearance, its sudden emergence, its surge forwards. Desire emerges just as it becomes embodied in speech, it emerges with symbolism.

To be sure, symbolism links up a certain number of these natural signs, of these loci, which captivate the human being. There is even the beginnings of symbolism in the instinctual capture of one animal by another. But that isn't what constitutes symbolism, it's the symbolising *Merken* which make what doesn't exist exist. You mark the six sides of a die, you roll the die – from this rolling die emerges desire. I am not saying *human* desire, for, after all, the man who plays with the die is captive to the desire thus put into play. He doesn't know the origin of his desire, as it rolls with the symbol written on its six sides.

Why is it only man who plays dice? Why don't the planets speak?

Questions I'll leave open for today.

18 May 1955

<sup>10</sup> (1905c) GW VI 63: Stud IV 59: SE VIII 60.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* GW VI 64: Stud IV 60: SE VIII 61.

## Introduction of the big Other

WHY THE PLANETS DO NOT SPEAK

POST-ANALYTIC PARANOIA

THE Z-SHAPED SCHEMA

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL OF LANGUAGE

IMAGINARY RE-MEMBERING<sup>1</sup> AND SYMBOLIC RECOGNITION

WHY ONE TRAINS ANALYSTS

Last time, I left you with a somewhat strange question, but one which came directly out of what I was saying to you – why don't the planets speak?

### 1

We aren't at all like planets, that's something we can have a sense of whenever we want, but that doesn't prevent us from forgetting it. We always have a tendency to reason about men as if they were moons, calculating their masses, their gravitation.

That isn't an illusion peculiar to us, us scientists [*savants*] – it is quite especially tempting for politicians.

I am thinking of a work which has been forgotten, though it wasn't that unreadable, because it probably wasn't written by the author who signed it – it had the title *Mein Kampf*. Well, in this work by the said Hitler, which has lost a great deal of its topicality, relations between men are spoken of as being like relations between moons. And there's always the temptation to construct a psychology and a psychoanalysis of moons, whereas all you need do to see the difference is refer directly to experience.

For instance, I am rarely altogether happy. Last time, I wasn't at all happy, no doubt because I tried to fly too high – I wouldn't have engaged in all that flapping of wings if everything had been well prepared. However, several kind people, those who accompany me to the door, told me that everybody was happy. Rather an exaggeration of the position, I imagine. No matter, that's what I was told. Moreover, at the time I wasn't convinced. But why not! So I said to myself – if the others are happy, that's the main thing. That's where I am different from a planet.

<sup>1</sup> 'remembrement', which does not have connotations of memory in French, and, in fact, is often translated as 'regrouping': the passage in the Seminar being referred to discusses the reaggregation of the limbs (cf. 'dismembering').

It isn't simply that I said that to myself, but that it is true – if you're happy, that's the most important thing. I would even say – given that I've been reassured that you were happy, well then, good Lord, I become happy as well. But, even so, with a little margin. Not exactly *happy-happy*. There was a space between the two. During the time it took me to realise that the main thing is that the other be happy, I persisted in my non-happiness.

So when am I really me then? When I'm not happy, or when I'm happy because the others are happy? This relation of the subject's satisfaction with the satisfaction of the other – to be understood, please, in its most radical form – is always at issue where man is concerned.

I would very much appreciate it if the fact that on this occasion I was dealing with my fellow beings doesn't fool you. I used this example, because I had promised myself to use the first example that came up after the question I left you with last time. But I hope that today I will get you to see that it would be wrong of you to think that it's the same other at issue here as that other I sometimes talk about to you, that other which is the ego, or more precisely its image. Here there's a radical difference between my non-satisfaction and the supposed satisfaction of the other. There is no image of identity, of reflexivity, but a relation of fundamental alterity.

We must distinguish two *others*, at least two – an other with a capital O, and an other with a small o, which is the ego. In the function of speech, we are concerned with the *Other*.

What I am saying is worth demonstrating. As always, I can only do so in terms of our experience. To those who would like to have some practice at some mental juggling which is bound to render their articulations more supple, I can't recommend too highly, for whatever use you may wish to put it, reading *Parmenides*, where the question of the one and the other was addressed in the most vigorous and single-minded way. That is no doubt why it is one of the most misunderstood of all works. When, after all, all it takes are the middling abilities – which should not be belittled – of a solver of crossword puzzles. Don't forget that in one of my written pieces, I formally recommended you to do crossword puzzles. The only thing which is essential is to hold your attention right to the end in developing the nine hypotheses. That's all that matters – paying attention. It is the most difficult thing in the world to get the average reader to do, as a result of the conditions under which the sport of reading is carried out. Those of my students who could devote themselves to a psychoanalytic commentary on the *Parmenides* would be doing something useful, and would allow the community to find its bearings in relation to a good many problems.

Let us come back to our planets. Why don't they speak? Who wants to articulate something?

All the same there are lots of things to say. What is odd is not that you don't

say any of them, but rather that you don't make it apparent that you realise that there's loads to say. If only you would dare to think it. It isn't very important to know what is the clinching reason. But what is certain, is that if one tries to enumerate them – I had no preconceived idea about the way they might be set out when I asked you it – the reasons which come to mind are structured like those we have already encountered on several occasions at play in Freud's work, namely those he comes up with in the dream of Irma's injection apropos of the kettle with a hole in it. The planets don't speak – firstly, because they have nothing to say – secondly, because they don't have the time – thirdly, because they have been silenced.

Each of these three things is true, and might permit us to make important statements with respect to what is called a planet, that is to say what I've taken as my term of reference in showing what we aren't.

I put the question to an eminent philosopher, one of our lecturers this year. He has been much preoccupied with the history of science and has made the most apt comments, the most profound there are, about Newtonianism. You always come away disappointed when you ask people who seem to be specialists, but you are going to see that, in actual fact, I wasn't disappointed. The question didn't seem to him to present any difficulties. He answered – *Because they don't have mouths.*

At first blush, I was a bit disappointed. When one is disappointed, one is always wrong. You should never be disappointed with the answers you receive, because if you are, that's wonderful, it proves that it was a real answer, that is to say exactly what you weren't expecting.

This point has considerable bearing on the question of the other. We have too great a tendency to be hypnotised by the so-called system of moons, and to model our idea of the answer on what we imagine when we talk about stimulus-response. If we receive the answer we were expecting, is it really an answer? That's another problem, and I won't get involved in that little diversion right now.

In the end, the philosopher's answer didn't disappoint me. No one is obliged to enter into the labyrinth of the question along the path mapped out by any one of the three reasons I mentioned, although we will encounter them again, for they are the true ones. One can enter into it just as well with any old answer, and the one I was given is extremely illuminating, on condition that one knows how to hear it. And I was in a very good position to listen to it, since I am a psychiatrist.

*I don't have a mouth*, we hear this when we're starting our careers, on the first psychiatric wards we, like lost souls, arrive on. At the heart of this miraculous world, we encounter very old ladies, very old spinsters, and the first thing they tell us is – *I don't have a mouth*. They inform us that they don't have a stomach either, and what is more that they will never die. In short, they have a very close

relationship to the lunar world. The only difference is that for these old ladies, victims of the so-called Cotard syndrome, or negation delirium, in the end that's true. What they have identified with is an image where every gap, every aspiration, every emptiness of desire is lacking, namely whatever it is that really constitutes the property of the buccal orifice. To the extent that the being's identification with its pure and simple image takes effect, there isn't any room for change either, that is to say death. That in fact is what their theme is – they are both dead and incapable of dying, immortal – like desire. To the extent that the subject here symbolically identifies himself with the imaginary, he in some way satisfies [réalise] desire.

The fact that the stars also happen not to have mouths and to be immortal pertains to another order – one can't say that it is true – it's real. There is no question of the stars having mouths. And, at least for us, the word immortal has over time become purely metaphorical. It is incontestably real that a star doesn't have a mouth, but no one would think of that, in the true sense of the word to think, if there weren't beings endowed with an apparatus for giving utterance to the symbolic, namely men, so as to make one notice it.

Stars are real, integrally real, in principle, there is absolutely nothing about them pertaining to an alterity with respect to themselves, they are purely and simply what they are. The fact that we always find them in the same place is one of the reasons why they don't speak.

You've noticed that from time to time I oscillate between planets and stars. It isn't by accident. For it wasn't the planets which manifested the *always in the same place* first, but the stars. The perfectly regular movement of the sidereal day is clearly what gave men their first opportunity of sensing the stability of the changing world surrounding them, and of starting to found the dialectic of the symbolic and the real, in which the symbolic apparently springs out from the real, which naturally isn't any more well-founded than thinking that the so-called fixed stars really revolve around the Earth. Similarly, one shouldn't think that symbols actually have come from the real. But it is nonetheless striking seeing how captivating these singular forms have been, whose grouping, after all, is not founded on anything. Why did human beings see the Great Bear that way? Why are the Pleiades so obvious? Why is Orion seen this way? I couldn't tell you if I tried. I am not aware that these points of light have even been grouped any differently – I'm asking you. In the dawn of humanity, which, incidentally, we cannot make out very clearly, this fact played quite a role. These signs have been tenaciously preserved to the present day, offering a rather bizarre example of the way in which the symbolic gets hitched up. The famous properties of form do not seem to provide an absolutely convincing explanation of the way in which we have grouped the constellations.

That said, we might have spared ourselves the trouble, since there is no foundation for this apparent stability of the stars we always find in the same place. Clearly we made genuine progress when we realised that there were, on

the other hand, things which really were in the same place, which were first perceived as wandering planets, and when we realised that it wasn't just as a function of our own rotation, but really, that some of the stars which fill the sky, move and are always to be found in the same place.

This reality is a first reason why the planets do not speak much. Nevertheless, one would be wrong to suppose that they are as dumb as all that. They are so far removed from that for a long time they were confused with natural symbols. We made them talk, and it would be wrong not to ask ourselves the question as to how that happened. For a very long time, and until rather recently, they retained a sort of subjective existence. Copernicus, who had nonetheless taken a decisive step in specifying the perfect regularity of the movement of the stars, still thought that an earthly body on the moon would make every effort to return home, that is to say to Earth, and that conversely a lunar body would not rest until it had flown back to its maternal home. That gives you an idea of how long these notions have persisted, and how difficult it is not to make beings out of realities.

AtlastNewton arrived. That had been in the making for some time – there is no better example than the history of science for showing you the extent to which human discourse is universal. Newton ended up stating the definitive formula which the world had been on the edge of for a century. Newton did definitively succeed in getting them to shut up. The eternal silence of infinite spaces, which petrified Pascal, is taken for granted after Newton – the stars do not speak, planets are dumb, and that's because they are silenced, which is the only real reason, for in the end you never really know what can happen with a reality.

Why don't planets speak? That is a real question. You only know what can happen to a reality once you have definitively reduced it to being inscribed in a language. We only became absolutely certain that the planets do not speak once they'd been shut up, that is to say once Newtonian theory had produced the theory of the unified field, in a form which has since been completed, a form which was already entirely satisfactory to every thinker. The theory of the unified field is summed up in the law of gravitation, which consists essentially in the fact that there's a formula which holds all this together, in an ultra-simple language consisting of three letters.

At the time, thinkers came up with all kinds of objections – this gravitation is unthinkable, we've never seen the like of this action at a distance, across a void, every kind of action is by definition an action of things in contact with one another. If you knew how hard Newtonian motion is to get hold of when examined up close! You would realise that operating with contradictory notions isn't the exclusive privilege of psychoanalysis. Newtonian motion makes use of time, but no one worries about the time of physics, because it doesn't in the slightest touch on realities – it's a question of proper language, and the unified field cannot be considered as anything more than a well-made language, than a syntax.

There's no cause to worry from that quarter – everything which enters into the unified field will never speak again, because these are realities which have been totally reduced to language. Here I think you can clearly see the opposition between speech and language.

Don't get the idea that our posture with respect to all the realities has attained a point of definite reduction, which is nonetheless rather satisfying – if planets and other things of the same order spoke, it would make a funny kind of discussion, and Pascal's *fright* might well be transformed into terror.

In fact, each time we deal with a residue of action, of truly authentic action, with this something new which emerges from the subject – this doesn't require that the subject be animated – we are confronted by something of which only our unconscious is not afraid. For at the level on which physics is currently moving, it would be wrong to imagine that it's all wrapped up, and that the atom and the electron have been silenced. Not at all. And it is obvious that we aren't here to go along with the musings about freedom to which people are wont to abandon themselves.

That is not at all what is at issue. It is clear that it's in relation to language that something funny happens. That is what Heisenberg's principle comes down to. When one is in a position to determine one of the properties of the system, one cannot formulate the others. When one speaks of the location of electrons, when one tells them to stay put somewhere, to remain always in the same place, one loses all sense of what is commonly called their velocity. Conversely, if one tells them – *well then, alright, you must always move in the same way* – one no longer has any idea where they are. I am not saying that we will always be in this eminently ludicrous position. But until things change, we can say that the elements don't answer where one asks them. More precisely, if one asks them somewhere, it is impossible to grasp them as a whole.

The question of knowing whether they speak isn't settled solely by their not answering. That's unsettling – one day, something may take us unawares. Let us not slide into mysticism – I'm not about to tell you that atoms and electrons speak. But why not? Everything happens *as if*. In any case, the matter would be settled the moment they started to lie to us. If atoms lied to us, tried to outwit us, we would be convinced, and quite rightly. There you've got your finger on the nub of the matter – the others as such, and not only in so far as they reflect our *a priori* categories and the more or less transcendental forms of our intuition.

These are things which we would prefer not to think about – if one day they started to get at us, you'd see where we'd end up. We wouldn't know where we were, quite literally, and that is indeed what Einstein thought all along and he never ceased to marvel at it. He always reminded people that the Almighty is a crafty one, but certainly not dishonest. Moreover, because it is a question here of a non-physical Almighty, that's the only thing which allows one to do science, that is to say, in the end reduce the Almighty to silence.

## 2

When it comes to this human science *par excellence* called psychoanalysis, is our aim to arrive at a unified field, and to turn men into moons? Do we get them to speak so much only so as to shut them up?

Besides, the most correct interpretation of the end of history invoked by Hegel is that it is the moment when all that men will have left to do is to close it. Is this a return to animal life? Are men who have reached the point of no longer needing language animals? An important question which seems to me to have received no meaningful answer. Whatever the case may be, the question of knowing what is the end of our practice is at the heart of analytic technique. Some disgraceful mistakes have been committed in this respect.

For the first time, I've read a very congenial article on what is called the typical cure. *The necessity of maintaining the ego's capacity for observation intact*, I see this written in bold letters. There's talk of a mirror, the analyst – that's not bad, but the author wants this mirror alive. A live mirror, I wonder what that is. Poor fellow, he talks about a living mirror because he clearly senses that there is something not quite right in this story. What's the essential thing in analysis? Does analysis consist in the imaginary realisation of the subject? The ego gets confused with the subject, and the ego is turned into a reality, something which, as they say, *integrates*, that is, which holds the planet together.

If this planet doesn't speak, it is not only because it is real, but because it doesn't have the time, in the literal sense – it doesn't have this dimension. Why? Because it is round. That's what integration is – whatever a circular form does, it is always equal to itself. What is advanced as being the aim of analysis is to make it well-rounded, this ego, to give it the spherical shape in which it will have definitively integrated all its disjointed fragmentary states, its scattered limbs, its pregenital phases, its partial drives, the pandemonium of its *egos*, countless and broken up as they are. A race to the triumphant *ego* – as many objects as *egos*.

It's not at all the case that everyone means the same thing by the term object relation, but by approaching things by way of the object relation and the partial drives, instead of locating it where it belongs, on the plane of the imaginary, the author I'm talking about, who for a time seemed to have got off to a good start, ends up with nothing less than the following perversion, which consists in locating the entire development of analysis in the imaginary relation of the subject to its most primitive diversity. Thank God, the experiment is never pushed to the limit, one doesn't do what one says one is doing, one stays well this side of one's goals. Thank God, his cures fail, and that is why the subject survives it.

Following the line the author I've just spoken of espoused, one can give an entirely rigorous demonstration of the fact that his way of conceiving of the

cure of obsessional neurosis will have no other result than that of making the subject paranoid. What seems to him the abyss one constantly skirts around in the cure of obsessional neurosis is the appearance of psychosis. In other words, according to the author in question, the obsessional neurotic is in fact a madman.

Let us dot the i's and cross the t's – what is this madman? He's a madman who keeps his distance from his madness, that is to say from the greatest imaginary perturbation there can be. He's a paranoid madman. To say that madness is the greatest imaginary perturbation as such doesn't define every kind of madness – I'm referring to states of delirium and paranoia. According to the author I'm reading, everything the obsessional says has got nothing to do with his experience. It is through verbal conformity, social language, that he maintains his precarious equilibrium – which is nonetheless very stable, for what could be harder than to catch out an obsessional? And if the obsessional does indeed resist and digs his heels in so vigorously, that's because, according to what the author I'm referring to has to say, psychosis, the imaginary disintegration of the ego, is behind all this. Unfortunately for his argument, the author cannot show us an obsessional whom he has truly sent round the bend. There's no possibility of doing that – and there are very good reasons why. But in wanting to guard the subject from his so-called menacing madnesses, he would succeed in ending up not that far from there.

Post-analytical paranoia is a long way from being a mythical problem. You don't have to have pushed the treatment very far for it to give rise to a perfectly consistent paranoia. I've actually seen that on this ward. This is the ward where you can see it most clearly, because there's a tendency to shift them gradually on to open wards, from which they often return, and integrate themselves into a closed ward. It happens. You don't need a very good psychoanalyst to get this to come about, it's sufficient to believe very fervently in psychoanalysis. I have seen paranoias one can call post-analytical, and which can be said to be spontaneous. In an adequate environment, where there's a very strong preoccupation with psychological facts, a subject can succeed, on condition nonetheless of having some inclination for it, in girding himself with problems which without any doubt are fictive, but to which he gives substance, within a ready-made language – that of psychoanalysis, which everyone talks about. It generally takes a very long time for a chronic delirium to get built up, the subject must put a lot into it – generally, he invests a third of his life in it. I must say that, to some extent, the analytic literature constitutes a ready-made<sup>2</sup> delirium, and it isn't rare to see subjects dressed up in it, ready-to-wear. The style, if I may put it like this, of those silent devotees of the ineffable mystery of the analytic experience, is an attenuated form of it, but its foundation is homogeneous with what for now I am calling paranoia.

<sup>2</sup> English in the original.

## 3

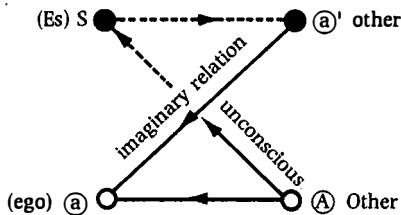
Today I would like to suggest a little schema to you, to illustrate the problems raised by the ego and the other, language and speech.

This schema would not be a schema if it yielded a solution. It isn't even a model. It's just a way of fixing our ideas, called for by an infirmity in our discursive capacity.

Because I think that you are already quite familiar with it, I haven't gone over what distinguishes the imaginary from the symbolic once again.

What do we know about the ego? Is the ego real, is it a moon, or is it an imaginary construction? We start with the idea, with which I've serenaded you for a long time, that there is no way of grasping anything whatsoever of the analytic dialectic if we do not assume that the ego is an imaginary construction. The fact that it is imaginary doesn't take anything away from it, the poor ego—I would even go so far as to say that that's what's good about it. If it weren't imaginary, we wouldn't be men, we would be moons. Which doesn't mean that all it takes to be men is to have this imaginary ego. We could still be that in-between thing called a madman. A madman is precisely someone who adheres to the imaginary, purely and simply.

This is what I'm talking about.



S is the letter *S*, but it's also the subject, the analytic subject, that is to say not the subject in its totality. People spend their time plaguing us about taking it in its totality. Why should it be a whole? We haven't the faintest idea. Have you ever encountered whole beings? Perhaps it's an ideal. I've never seen any. I'm not whole. Neither are you. If we were whole, we would each be in our corners, whole, we wouldn't be here, together, trying to get ourselves into shape, as they say. It is the subject, not in its totality, but in its opening up. As usual, he doesn't know what he's saying. If he knew what he was saying, he wouldn't be there. He is there, down on the right.

To be sure, that isn't where he sees himself—that is never the case—even at the end of analysis. He sees himself in *a*, and that is why he has an ego. He may believe that this ego is him, everybody is at that stage, and there is no way of getting out of it.

What analysis teaches us, on the other hand, is that the ego is an absolutely fundamental form for the constitution of objects. In particular, it perceives what we call, for structural reasons, its fellow being, in the form of the specular other. This form of the other has a very close relation to the ego, which can be superimposed on it, and we write it as  $a'$ .

So there's the plane of the mirror, the symmetrical world of the *egos* and of the homogeneous others. We'll have to distinguish another level, which we call the wall of language.

The imaginary gains its false reality, which nonetheless is a verified reality, starting off from the order defined by the wall of language. The ego such as we understand it, the other, the fellow being, all these imaginary things are objects. To be sure, they aren't homogeneous with moons – and we are liable to forget that all the time. But they are indeed objects, because they are named as such within an organised system, that of the wall of language.

When the subject talks to his fellow beings, he uses ordinary language, which holds the imaginary egos to be things which are not simply *ex-existing*, but real. Not knowing what there is in the domain in which the concrete dialogue is held, he is dealing with a certain number of characters,  $a'$ .  $a''$ . In so far as the subject brings them into relation with his own image, those with whom he speaks are also those with whom he identifies.

That said, we, the analysts, must not overlook our basic assumption – we think there are subjects other than us, that authentically intersubjective relations exist. We would have no reason to think that if we didn't have the testimony of the characterising feature of intersubjectivity, that is, that the subject can lie to us. That is the decisive proof. I am not saying that that is the sole foundation of the reality of the other subject, it is its proof. In other words, we in fact address  $A_1$ ,  $A_2$ , those we do not know, true Others, true subjects.

They are on the other side of the wall of language, there where in principle I never reach them. Fundamentally, it is them I'm aiming at every time I utter true speech, but I always attain  $a'$ ,  $a''$ , through reflection. I always aim at true subjects, and I have to be content with shadows. The subject is separated from the Others, the true ones, by the wall of language.

If speech is founded in the existence of the Other, the true one, language is so made as to return us to the objectified other, to the other whom we can make what we want of, including thinking that he is an object, that is to say that he doesn't know what he's saying. When we use language, our relation with the other always plays on this ambiguity. In other words, language is as much there to found us in the Other as to drastically prevent us from understanding him. And that is indeed what is at stake in the analytic experience.

The subject doesn't know what he is saying, and for the best of reasons, because he doesn't know what he is. But he sees himself. He sees himself from the other side, in an imperfect manner, as you know, as a consequence of the

fundamentally incomplete nature of the specular *Urbild*, which is not only imaginary, but illusory. The perverted inflection which analytic technique has been acquiring for some time is founded on this fact. Within this perspective, one would like the subject to aggregate all the more or less fragmented, fragmentary pieces of this thing in which he fails to recognise himself [*se méconnait*]. One wants him in effect to gather everything which he experienced in the pregenital stage, his scattered limbs, his partial drives, the succession of partial objects – think of Carpaccio's *Saint George* skewering the dragon, with small severed heads, arms, and so on, all around. One wants to allow this ego to gather its strength, to realise itself, to integrate itself – the dear little thing. If this end is pursued in a direct fashion, if one focuses on the imaginary and the pregenital, one necessarily ends up in that sort of analysis in which the consummation of partial objects is achieved through the intermediary of the image of the other. Without knowing why, the authors who follow this path all end up with the same conclusion – the ego can only re-encounter and reconstitute itself by way of the fellow being the subject has before him – or behind him, the result is the same.

The subject reconcentrates his own imaginary ego essentially in the form of the analyst's ego. Besides, this ego doesn't remain simply imaginary, for the spoken intervention of the analyst is expressly conceived of as an encounter of ego with ego, as a projection by the analyst of precise objects. In this perspective, the analysis is always represented and planned on the plane of objectivity. What is at issue, as it's written up, is to get the subject to shift from a psychic reality to a true reality, that is to say a moon reconstituted in the imaginary, and very precisely, something also not hidden from us, on the model of the ego of the analyst. This account is sufficiently coherent to realise that it isn't a matter of being indoctrinated, nor of showing what one should be doing in the world. It is clearly on the imaginary level that one is operating. That is why nothing would be more appreciated than locating the ineffable experience beyond what is considered to be the illusion, and not the wall, of language.

Amongst several clinical examples to hand, there's a very pretty vignette, that of the patient terrorised by the thought that the analyst knows what she has in her suitcase. She both knows it and she doesn't. Everything she manages to say is neglected by the analyst from the perspective of this imaginary worry. And all of a sudden, you realise that that is the only thing of importance – she is afraid that the analyst will take away everything she has got in her belly, that is to say the contents of the suitcase, which symbolises her partial object.

The notion of the imaginary assumption of partial objects through the intermediary of the figure of the analyst leads to a kind of *Comulgatorio*, to use the title which Balthasar Gracián gave to a Treatise on the Holy Eucharist, leads to an imaginary consummation of the analyst. A strange communion – at the stall, a head with parsley stuffed up its nose, or again with a well-cut piece in his

pants, and as Apollinaire said in *The Breasts of Tiresias – Eat the feet of your analyst in the same sauce*, that's the fundamental theory of analysis.

Isn't there another conception of analysis, which allows one to conclude that it is something other than the reconstitution of a fundamental imaginary partialisation of the subject?

This partialisation does in fact exist. It is one of the dimensions which enable the analyst to operate through identification, by giving the subject his own ego. I'll spare you the details, but it is certain that the analyst can, by means of a specific interpretation of the resistances, by a specific reduction of the total experience of the analysis to its solely imaginary elements, succeed in projecting on to the patient the different characteristics of his analytical ego – and God knows they can differ, in a way which comes clear at the end of analyses. What Freud taught us is exactly the opposite.

One trains analysts so that there are subjects in whom the ego is absent. That is the ideal of analysis, which, of course, remains virtual. There is never a subject without an ego, a fully realised subject, but that in fact is what one must aim to obtain from the subject in analysis.

The analysis must aim at the passage of true speech, joining the subject to an other subject, on the other side of the wall of language. That is the final relation of the subject to a genuine Other, to the Other who gives the answer one doesn't expect, which defines the terminal point of the analysis.

Throughout the course of the analysis, on the sole condition that the ego of the analyst does agree not to be there, on the sole condition that the analyst is not a living mirror, but an empty mirror, what happens happens between the ego of the subject – it is always the ego of the subject which speaks, ostensibly – and the others. The entire development of the analysis consists in the progressive displacement of this relation, which the subject can grasp at any moment, beyond the wall of language, as being the transference, which is his and in which he doesn't recognise himself. It isn't a matter of reducing this relation, as you'll find it written, but of having the subject assume it where he is. The analysis consists in getting him to become conscious of his relations, not with the ego of the analyst, but with all these Others who are his true interlocutors, whom he hasn't recognised. It is a matter of the subject progressively discovering which Other he is truly addressing, without knowing it, and of him progressively assuming the relations of transference at the place where he is, and where at first he didn't know he was.

There are two meanings to be given to Freud's phrase – *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*. This *Es*, take it as the letter *S*. It is there, it is always there. It is the subject. He knows himself or he doesn't know himself. That isn't even the most important thing – he speaks or he doesn't speak. At the end of the analysis, it is him who must be called on to speak, and to enter into relation with the real Others. Where the *S* was, there the *Ich* should be.

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That is where the subject authentically re-integrates his disjointed limbs, and recognises, reaggregates his experience.

In the course of an analysis, something like an object may be formed. But this object, far from being what is at issue, is only a fundamentally alienated form of it. It is the imaginary ego which gives it its centre and its group, and it is clearly identifiable with a form of alienation, akin to paranoia. That the subject ends up believing in the ego is in itself madness. Thank God, analysis very rarely succeeds in that, but we have a thousand proofs that it is being pushed in that direction.

This will be our programme for next year – what does paranoia mean? What does schizophrenia mean? Paranoia, as compared with schizophrenia, always has a relation to the imaginary alienation of the ego.

*25 May 1955*

## Objectified analysis

A CRITIQUE OF FAIRBAIRN  
IN ANALYSIS, WHY DOES ONE SPEAK?  
THE IMAGINARY ECONOMY AND THE SYMBOLIC REGISTER  
THE IRRATIONAL NUMBER

The schema I gave you last time assumes that speech is propagated like light, in a straight line. That shows you the extent to which it is only metaphorical, analogical.

What interferes with the wall of language is the specular relation, whereby what pertains to the ego is always perceived, appropriated, via the intermediary of an other, who for the subject always retains the properties of the *Urbild*, of the fundamental image of the ego. Hence the misapprehensions [*méconnaissances*] thanks to which misunderstandings no less than ordinary communication – which itself rests on the said misunderstandings – become established.

This schema has more than one property, as I have shown you in teaching you how to transform it. I have also pointed out to you that the attitude of the analyst may vary considerably, and bring into the analysis diverse, even opposed, consequences.

We've come up against it, or we've come to the crossroads – in analysis, what takes place, depending on whether one assumes the speech relation to be the matrix or, on the contrary, whether one objectifies the analytic situation? According to the authors, and the practitioners, every objectivation, with varying intensity, turns the analysis into a process of remodelling of the ego, on the model of the ego of the analyst.

This criticism takes on all its significance if one is aware of the fundamentally specular, alienated character of the ego. Every kind of ego rendered present as such renders an imaginary function present, if only the ego of the analyst – an ego is always an ego, however perfected it may be.

Certainly, analysis has taken these paths for a good reason. Freud did in fact reintegrate the ego. But was that in order to recentre analysis on the object and on object relations?

Today the object relation is what is on the agenda. I've told you how central it was to all the ambiguities which now make it so difficult to recapture the meaning of the last segments of Freud's work, and to relocate recent technical

investigations within the framework of the often forgotten meaning of analysis.

What I teach you here are fundamental alphabetical notions, it is a compass-card, a panoramic table, rather than a complete cartography of the present problems of analysis. This assumes that, armed with this panoramic table, you should try to make your own way using the map, and put my teaching to the test with an extensive reading of Freud's work.

One hears so and so saying that the theory I'm proposing to you here doesn't coincide with what can be found in such and such a text of Freud's. I could easily reply that, in all truth, before broaching the text, one has to comprehend the whole. The *ego* appears in several places in Freud's work. Someone who hasn't studied the *ego* in *On Narcissism: an Introduction* cannot follow what Freud says about it in *Das Ich und das Es*, which refers the *ego* to the perceptual-consciousness system.

Even within the topographical argument of *Das Ich und das Es*, you cannot do full justice to a definition like this one, which makes the *ego* equivalent to the system of perception-consciousness, by isolating it. This equation cannot pass for a definition. Isolated, it is simply a convention or a tautology.

If it is just to end up with a schema which can support a thousand interpretations – I am talking about this famous schema of the egg, which has had such a hypnotic effect throughout analysis, in which the *ego* is seen as a kind of lentil, a germinating point, a differentiated part, organised by the mass of the id, whereby the relation is tied to reality – in truth there was no need for the immense detour of Freud's work. Besides, the important thing about this schema is that the *ego*'s organisation is dependent on something completely heterogeneous to it from the point of view of organisation.

The danger with any schema, and especially with any schema which reifies too much, is that the mind immediately falls on it and sees in it only the most summary of images.

## 1

Last time, I picked a reference from close to home. Today I've picked an Englishman, or rather a Scotsman, with the name of Fairbairn, who tried, not without a certain rigour, to reformulate the whole of analytic theory in terms of object relations. You'll find this reading accessible – his article, 'Endopsychic structure considered in terms of object-relationships', appeared in volume 25 of the *International Journal of Psycho-analysis*.

The aim is to describe endopsychic structure in terms of object relations. There's a greater interest to this than if it were an author's particular theory. You will recognise the familiar traces of the manner in which we relate cases, in which we give an account of the incidences and the forces of psychic reality, with which we summarise the treatment. The schema he elaborates, his

imagery, has some connection with what we cover by the term 'imaginary economy'. You will also see clearly the great risks which analysis runs by sticking to the level of such a conceptualisation.

It would be best to read the whole of the article, to follow its development – each of you do this work on your own. My exposé will give direction to your research, and will, I hope, encourage you to monitor what I am telling you.

Here's the schema which the author arrives at, traced out by the roles in a dream he recounts. Those of you who have just heard a lecture on psychodrama here, which will moreover be revived this evening, will immediately see the family resemblance, which testifies to a degradation of the theory of analysis.<sup>1</sup> One cannot speak about psychodrama without taking sides – this practice has nothing in common with analytic practice.

There are, according to our author, heterogeneities, peculiar asymmetries, in Freudian theory. The whole thing must be renovated, he says. *As far as I'm concerned*, says Fairbairn, *I don't understand any of it* – rather than talking about a libido which we don't know how to handle, and which we end up identifying with the drives, which is indeed a way of objectifying it, why not simply talk of the object? The concept of the libido as energy, with which Freud started, has indeed given rise to all kinds of confusions, since it has been identified with the capacity to love.

According to Freud, Fairbairn says in his language, in his tongue, the libido is pleasure-seeking,<sup>2</sup> it seeks pleasure. But we've changed all that, and we've realised that the libido is object-seeking.<sup>2</sup> Besides, Freud did have some idea of it – the author of these lines, like so many people, hasn't realised that Freud talks of love just when he still thinks what's involved is the criticism of the theory of the libido as – do you see the relation with what I said last time? – something which at least raises the problem of its adaptation to objects. In the end, this notion of object-seeking libido pervades everything which follows.

One of the mainsprings, one of the keys of the doctrine which I expound here, is the distinction between the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. I try to get you used to it, to break you into it. This conception allows you to perceive the secret confusion hidden under this notion of object. This notion of object is in fact sustained by the straightforward confusion of these three terms.

Since objects there are, the objects are there always represented by the way in which the subject brings them – that is what you take literally. And when you grasp them objectively, as one says, that is to say without the knowledge of the subject, you represent them to yourselves as objects homogeneous with those which the subject brings you. Lord knows how you will find your way in the midst of all that.

Fairbairn distinguishes the central *ego* and the libidinal *ego*. The central *ego* is

<sup>1</sup> On 1 June 1955, J. L. Moreno gave a lecture to the Société Française de Psychanalyse entitled 'Psychodrama'. <sup>2</sup> English in the original.

more or less the *ego* as it has always been imagined once the individual organic unity was reified on the psychic level in terms of the idea of its unity, that is to say once the individual's psychic synthesis was taken to be a given tied to the functioning of the apparatuses. Here it is a psychic object, as such closed off from any dialectic, the empirical *ego* of the classical conception, the object of psychology. One part of this central *ego* emerges in the conscious and the preconscious – see what a meagre functional value the original references to the conscious and the preconscious are henceforth reduced to. And, of course, the other part of this *ego* is unconscious – which no one has ever denied, even in the most outdated psychology.

This unconscious part gives us no access whatsoever to a subjective dimension which might be related to repressed significations. That is the concern of another organised *ego*, the libidinal *ego*, directed towards objects. The latter, in view of the extreme difficulty of its relations to these objects, has undergone a dissociation, a schize, such that its organisation, which is actually that of an *ego*, has been forced back into that of an autonomous function, which from now on no longer fits in with the functioning of the central *ego*.

Here you recognise a conception which easily takes shape in one's mind on first acquaintance with analytic doctrine. It is a vulgarised doctrine. And that is how a number of analysts have now managed to conceive of the process of repression.

But the situation is far from being as simple as that, for the existence of something else has for some time now been discovered in the unconscious, which isn't libidinal, but is aggressivity, which has led to a grand reworking of analytic theory. Freud didn't confuse internal aggressivity with the super-ego. In Fairbairn, we come upon a quite exciting notion, for the author doesn't seem to have found in the English language a term which appeared to him to signify adequately the disruptive, almost demonic, function of the super-ego, so he made one up – the *internal<sup>3</sup> saboteur*.

If this saboteur is repressed, it is because at the beginning of the development of the individual two peculiarly inconvenient objects are to be found. These two problematic objects have the bizarre property of having initially been one and the same object. It wouldn't surprise you if I told you that, first and last, we're actually dealing with the mother. Everything leads back to the original frustration or non-frustration.

I'm not distorting anything. I ask each one of you to have a look at this exemplary article, exemplary because it makes quite clear what underlies many moderate, more subtle positions.

The essential structure is the primitive schize between the two faces, good and bad, of the first object, that is to say of the feeding mother. Everything else

<sup>3</sup> English in the original.

will be only elaboration, ambiguity, homonymy. The Oedipus complex is only superimposed on this primitive structuration, by giving it motifs<sup>4</sup> – in the ornamental sense of the word. Later, the father and the mother share out, in a way which may be quite subtle, the fundamental roles which are written into the primitive division of the object, on the one hand exciting,<sup>5</sup> exciting desire, the libido here being confused with the desire objectified in its conditioning – on the other rejecting.<sup>5</sup>

I don't want to take you too far, but it is clear that exciting<sup>5</sup> and rejecting<sup>5</sup> do not belong on the same level. Basically, 'rejecting'<sup>5</sup> implies a subjectification of the object. On the exclusively objective plane, an object is either frustrating or it isn't. Whereas the notion of rejection secretly introduces the intersubjective relation, non-recognition. That gives you an idea of the confusion to which one is forever liable to succumb, even in discussions like this one.

But I'm not here to correct Fairbairn. I am trying to uncover his intentions and the results of his work for you. He reduces repression down to a tendency to repulsion and he distinguishes the libidinal *ego* and the internal<sup>5</sup> saboteur, for the best reasons, which are that the two primitive objects, which in reality make up only one, are difficult to handle.

To be sure, it is a fact that the object is a long way from being univocal, and it elicits from the subject the anguish of rejection as well as the continually renewed libidinal incitation, thanks to which this anguish is reactivated. There's no contesting that internalisation of the bad object occurs. As has been remarked, if it is urgent to internalise something, whatever inconvenience may result from that, it is usually this bad object which is picked on, so as to master it, rather than the good one, which is best left outside, where it can exert its beneficent influence. In the wake of the internalisation of the bad object, a process is set in motion whereby the libidinal *ego*, which is considered too dangerous, reactivating in too acute a fashion the drama which led to the primitive internalisation, will itself be, secondarily, rejected by the central *ego*.

The latter is the object of a double, a supplementary, repulsion, manifested this time in the form of aggression stemming from the agency, itself repressed, of the internal<sup>5</sup> saboteur, in a close relation to the bad primitive objects.

That's the schema we get to, and as you see, it may well remind us of more than one clinically observed phenomenon in the behaviour of neurotic subjects.

This schema is illustrated by a dream. The subject dreams that she is the object of an act of aggression on the part of a character who turns out to be an actress – the function of the actress plays a special part in her story. The rest of the dream permits the specification on the one hand of the relations of the aggressive character with the mother of the subject, and on the other, the splitting [*dédoublement*] of the character attacked in the first part of the dream

<sup>4</sup> 'motifs' – meaning both 'motifs' and 'motives', which Lacan then distinguishes.

<sup>5</sup> English in the original.

into two characters, respectively male and female, who change in the way moiré effects do, leaving ambiguous the appearance of a given object. Through a kind of pulsation, one sees the attacked character pass from a feminine to a masculine form, in which the author has no difficulty recognising his exciting object<sup>6</sup> well repressed behind the two others, an inert element which thus finds itself at the foundation of the unconscious psyche, and which the subject's associations allow to identify as her husband, with whom she has undoubtedly difficult relations.

What can be deduced from this schema as regards the action of the analyst? The individual lives in a perfectly defined and stable world, with the objects which are destined to be his. It is thus a matter of getting him to rediscover the path to a normal relation with these objects, which are there, awaiting him.

The difficulty stems from the hidden existence of these objects, which from this point on are called internal objects, which hinder and paralyse the subject. At the beginning, their character was coaptating, they had, if one may say so, a fully-fledged reality. If they then acquired this function, it is because of the momentary impotence of the subject, it is because the subject didn't know how to face the primitive encounter with an object which didn't live up to expectations. I'm not forcing anything, that's what the text says.

The mother, we are told, didn't fulfil her maternal function. One assumes, in effect, that, in her natural function, the mother is in no way a rejecting object – in the state of nature the mother can only be good, and it is on account of the specific conditions under which we live that such an accident can happen. The subject separates itself from a part of itself, abandons the coat of Joseph, rather than be subjected to ambivalent excitations. The drama stems from this ambiguity – the object is both good and bad.

This schema is not all faults. In particular one can show that any valid notion of the *ego* must in effect put it into correlation with the objects. But to say that the objects are internalised, there's the sleight of hand. The whole point is to know what an internalised object is. Here we try to solve this question by speaking of the imaginary, with all its implications. In particular, the function which the imaginary plays in the biological order is in fact very far from being identical to that of the real.

In Fairbairn, there is no critique of this order. The object is an object. It is taken as a mass. The position chosen to objectify it, namely the beginning of the subject's life, leads to confusion of the imaginary and the real: thus, the imaginary value of the mother is no less great than the value of her real character. But however dominating these two registers may be, there are no grounds for confusing them, as is done here.

The libidinal *ego* must be integrated, that is to say it must find the objects

<sup>6</sup> Both words in English in the original.

which are destined for it, and which partake of a double nature, real and imaginary. On the one hand, they are imaginary in so far as they are objects of desire – if there is something which analysis has from the beginning brought to the fore, doubtless it is the fecundity of the libido in the creation of objects corresponding to the stages of its development. On the other hand, these objects are real objects – it is taken for granted that we cannot give them to the individual, that isn't within our power. What's at issue is allowing him to make manifest, in relation to the exciting<sup>7</sup> object, that is to say eliciting the imaginary reaction, the libido whose repression constitutes the knot of his neurosis.

If we retain a schema like this one, there is in effect only one course. To know which path the analyst must take, one must know where he is in this schema.

Now, take careful note of the following – when the author deduces from the dream the differentiation of this multiplicity of *egos*, as he puts it, the central<sup>7</sup> *ego* is nowhere to be seen, he assumes it – the whole scene takes place in this *ego*, which observes it. If we now move on from the schema of the individual to that of the analytic situation, there's only one place to locate the analyst – precisely in place of the *ego* who observes. This second interpretation has the advantage of justifying the first. For up until now, in this theory, the *ego*, in so far as it observes, has none of the active characteristics of the *ego*. On the other hand, if there's someone who observes, it is the analyst, and it is his function that he projects into this central<sup>7</sup> *ego*, which he posits in his subject.

The observing analyst is just as much someone who intervenes in the revelation of the function of the repressed object, the correlative of the libidinal *ego*. The subject manifests the images of his desire, and the analyst is there to enable him to rediscover the appropriate images, with which he can harmonise. Now, the difference between psychic reality and true reality being, as we are told, precisely that psychic reality is subjected to that identification consisting in a relation to images, there is no other measure of the normality of the images than that given by the imaginary world of the analyst.

So any theorisation of analysis organised around the object relation amounts in the end to advocating the recomposition of the subject's imaginary world according to the norm of the analyst's *ego*. The original introjection of the rejecting object<sup>7</sup>, which has poisoned the exciting<sup>7</sup> function of the said object, is corrected by the introjection of a correct *ego*, that of the analyst.

## 2

Why does one talk in analysis? According to this way of looking at things, it's to keep the audience amused. The analyst has to be on the look out, at the limit of the domain of speech, for what captivates the subject, what stops him, makes

<sup>7</sup> English in the original.

him jib, inhibits him, scares him. He should objectify the subject in order to rectify him on an imaginary plane which can only be that of the dual relation, that is to say the analyst as model, in the absence of any other system of reference.

Freud was never satisfied with such a schema. If he had wanted to conceptualise analysis in such a way, he would have had no need for a *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

We don't come upon the imaginary economy at the limit of our experience, it isn't an ineffable experience, it's not a question of looking for a better economy of mirages. The imaginary economy has meaning, we gain some purchase on it, only in so far as it is transcribed into the symbolic order, where a ternary relation is imposed. Although Fairbairn's schema is modelled on the dream which illustrates it, the crucial fact is that this dream is recounted by the subject. And experience tells us that this dream isn't dreamt at any old time, any old way, nor is it addressed to no one. The dream has all the value of a direct declaration of the subject. It is in the very fact that he communicates it to you, that he adjudges himself to have this particular inhibited, difficult, attitude, in some cases, or on the contrary one made easier in others, feminine or masculine, etc., that's where the lever of the analysis is to be found. It is not superfluous that he is capable of saying it in speech. From the start, his experience is organised in the symbolic order. The legal order into which he is inducted almost from the beginning gives signification to these imaginary relations, as a function of what I call the unconscious discourse of the subject. Through all this, the subject is trying to say something, and to do so in a language which is virtually offered in order to become speech, that is to say to be communicated. The spoken clarification is the mainspring of progress. The images will take on their meaning in a wider discourse, in which the entire history of the subject is integrated. The subject is as such historicised from one end to the other. This is where the analysis is played out – on the frontier between the symbolic and the imaginary.

The subject doesn't have a dual relation with an object with which he is confronted, it is in relation to another subject that his relations with this object acquire their meaning, and by the same token their value. Inversely, if he has relations with this object, it is because a subject other than himself has relations with this object, and they can both name it, in an order different from that of the real. As soon as it can be named, its presence can be invoked as an original dimension, distinct from reality. Nomination is invocation of presence, and sustaining of presence in absence.

In short, the schema which places the object relation at the heart of the theorisation of analysis misses the mainspring of the analytic experience, namely that the subject gives an account of himself.

The fact that he gives an account of himself is the dynamic mainspring of the

analysis. The rents that appear, thanks to which you can go beyond what he is recounting to you, are not an a-side in the discourse, they occur in the text of the discourse. It is in so far as something in the discourse appears to be irrational that you can bring in the images with their symbolic value.

This is the first time that I'm granting that there is something irrational. Don't worry, I take this term in its arithmetical sense. There are numbers which are called irrational, and the first one which comes to mind, however unfamiliar you may be with this thing, is  $\sqrt{2}$ , which brings us back to the *Meno*, the archway through which we passed to begin the year.

There is no common measure between the square's diagonal and its side. It took a very long time for us to admit that. However small you make it, you won't find it. That is what we call irrational.

Euclid's geometry is precisely founded on this, that one can employ in an equivalent way the two symbolised realities which have no common measure. And it is precisely because they don't have a common measure that one can employ them in an equivalent way. That is what Socrates does in his dialogue with the slave – *You have a square, you want to make the square twice as big, what do you have to do?*<sup>8</sup> The slave replies that he will make the length twice as long. The point is to get him to understand that if he takes a length twice as long, he will get a square four times the size. And there is no way of making a square twice as big.

But it is neither squares nor diamonds that are being manipulated. Lines are being traced out, that is to say, they are being introduced into reality. That is what Socrates doesn't tell the slave. It is thought that the slave knows everything, all he has to do is recognise it. But on condition that the work's been done for him. The work is in tracing out this line, and in making use of it in a way equivalent to that which is supposed to be given at the start, allegedly real. When it was simply a matter of larger or smaller, of real little squares, whole numbers were introduced. In other words, the images give the appearance of evidence to what is essentially symbolic manipulation. If one finds the solution to the problem, that is to say a square which is twice the size of the first square, it is because one started by destroying the first square as such, by taking a triangle from it, and by reconstituting it with a second square. This assumes a whole field of symbolic assumptions hidden behind the false evidence to which the slave is brought to adhere.

Nothing is less obvious than a space containing in itself its own intuitions. It took a world of surveyors, of practical procedures, preceding the people who discourse so knowledgeably in the agora of Athens, in order that the slave no longer be what he could have been, living on the banks of a great river, in a wild state of nature, in a space of waves and sweeps of sand, on a perpetually

shifting, pseudopial beach. A very long time spent learning was needed, learning to fold things on to others, to match up outlines, to begin to conceive of a space structured in an homogeneous way in three dimensions. It's you who introduce these three dimensions, you with your symbolic world.

The incommensurability of the irrational number introduces these first imaginary inert structurations, invigorated, reduced to operations like those which we still find turning up in the first books of Euclid. Remember with what care one generates the isosceles triangle, checks that it hasn't moved, superimposes it upon itself. That's the way one starts geometry, and that's the trace of its umbilical cord. In fact, nothing is more essential to the Euclidian construction than the fact that one turns on to itself something which, in the end, is just a trace – not even a trace, nothing at all. And that is why, when one grasps it, one is so scared of making it perform operations in a space which it isn't ready to confront. In truth, that is how one perceives the extent to which it is the symbolic order which introduces the entire reality that is at issue.

In the same way, the images of our subject are buttoned down [*capitonnesées*] in the text of his history, they are enmeshed in the symbolic order, in which the human subject is inducted into an event which is just as coalescing as you might imagine the original relation to be, which we are forced to admit as being a kind of residue of the real. As soon as the human being experiences this contrasting rhythm scanned by the first wail and its cessation, something is revealed, something which is operative in the symbolic order.

Anyone who's observed a child has seen that the same blow, the same knock, the same slap, isn't received in the same fashion, depending on whether it is punitive or accidental. The symbolic relation is constituted as early as possible, even prior to the fixation of the self image of the subject, prior to the structuring image of the ego, introducing the dimension of the subject into the world, a dimension capable of creating a reality other than that experienced as brute reality, as the encounter of two masses, the collision of two balls. The imaginary experience is inscribed in the register of the symbolic as early on as you can think it. Everything that happens in the order of the object relation is structured as a function of the particular history of the subject, and that is why analysis, and the transference, are possible.

### 3

It remains for me to tell you what the function of the ego in analysis correctly centred on the exchange of speech should be. That's what I'll do next time.

If today's session had seemed too arid to you, I will call upon a literary reference, whose connotations are quite striking. The ego is only one object amongst others in the world of objects, in as much as they are symbolised, but on the other hand, it has its own self-evidence, and for the best of reasons. There

is a very close relation between ourselves and what we call our ego. In its insertions in the real, it does not at all appear to us in the guise of an image.

If there is something which gives us a demonstration of the mirage-like quality of the ego, in the most problematic of manners, it must be the reality of the double, and what is more, the possibility of the illusion of the double. In short, the imaginary identity of two real objects puts the function of the ego to the test, and that is what will encourage me to open the next seminar with some literary reflections on the character of Sosie.

The latter didn't come into being at the same time as the legend of Amphitryon, but later. Plautus introduced him as a kind of comic double, the Sosie *par excellence*, of the most magnificent of cuckolds, Amphitryon. This legend was richly embellished in the course of time and the richest version is that of Molière – not the last, though, for there was a German one, in the eighteenth century, of a mystical variety, invoked as a kind of Virgin Mary, and then the marvellous Giraudoux, in which the resonances of pathos go far beyond simple literary virtuosity. Reread all that for next time.

Since today we have studied a small mechanical schema with the happiest of results, it is natural that I should turn to a dramatic model to illustrate the theorisation of analysis in the symbolic register. I will try to show you, in Molière's *Amphitryon*, what I will call, to parody the title of a recent book, the *adventures – the misadventures even – of psychoanalysis*.

1 June 1955

Sosie<sup>1</sup>

THE HUSBAND, THE WIFE AND THE GOD  
 THE WOMAN, OBJECT OF EXCHANGE  
 ME, WHO KICKS YOU OUT<sup>2</sup>  
 THE SPLITTINGS [DÉDOUBLEMENTS] OF THE OBSESSONAL

Who's read *Amphitryon*?

Today we will be concerned with the ego. We are approaching the question of the ego from another angle than the one we adopted last year. Last year, we dealt with it in connection with the phenomenon of transference. This year, we are trying to understand it in relation to the symbolic order.

Man lives in the midst of a world of language, in which that phenomenon called speech occurs. We believe that analysis takes place in this environment. If we don't situate this environment clearly in relation to other environments, which also exist, the real environment, the environment of imaginary mirages, one obliges analysis to deviate either towards interventions bearing on the real — a trap one falls into but rarely — or, on the contrary, by placing in our opinion an unwarranted emphasis on the imaginary. By following this thread of Ariadne we are brought today to Molière's play, *Amphitryon*.

## 1

I made an allusion to *Amphitryon* in the presence of our visitor, Moreno, when I said to him that it must surely be the case that our wives cheat on us with God from time to time. It is one of those lapidary formulae which one can use in the course of a joust. It deserves a little closer examination.

Surely you must see that the function of the father is only as crucial as it is within the whole of analytic theory because it is to be found on several levels. We have already been able to see, taking the *Wolfman*, what distinguishes the symbolic father, what I call the *name of the father*, from the imaginary father, the rival of the real father, in so far as he is endowed, poor man, with all sorts of

<sup>1</sup> 'sosie' has come to be a reasonably common synonym for 'double' in French; Robert gives 1638 as the first occasion of this usage, and notes it became widespread in 1668, the year Molière wrote *Amphitryon*.

<sup>2</sup> 'Moi qui te sous dehors'.

layers, just like everybody else. Well then, this distinction warrants being taken up on the level of the couple.

In truth, fine minds, solid minds – you meet up with some like that, punctuating history – have already been stirred up by the relations between marriage and love. These things are in general treated in a playful, racy, cynical style. There's a good old French tradition of that, and that may well be the best way of dealing with it, in any case, as far as the practical side of everyday life is concerned. But one of the more serious thinkers can be observed to have one day come upon marriage and love, and not taken them lightly.

I highly recommend you read Proudhon – he had a solid mind, and you rediscover in him the assured emphasis of the Church Fathers. He had thought, at a little distance, about the human condition, and tried to get close to something far more tenacious as well as far more fragile than one thinks, namely fidelity. He arrived at this question – what can be the motive for fidelity, apart from having given one's word? But often one gives one's word lightly. And if it weren't given in such a manner, it is probable that it would be given far more infrequently, which would noticeably hold up the flow of things, good and worthy, in human society.

As we have remarked, that doesn't prevent it from being given and from bearing all its fruits. When it is broken, not only does everyone get upset, and indignant, but it has consequences, whether we like it or not. That is precisely one of the things which we are taught by analysis, and by the exploration of this unconscious in which speech continues to propagate its waves and its destinies. How can one justify this speech, so impudently engaged in, and properly speaking, as no serious mind has ever doubted, untenable?

Let us try to overcome the romantic illusion, that it is perfect love, the ideal value which each of the partners acquires for the other, which upholds human commitment. Proudhon, whose every thought runs counter to romantic illusions, tries, in a style which might at first pass for mystical, to give fidelity its due within marriage. And he finds the solution in something which can only be recognised as a symbolic pact.

Let us look at it from the woman's perspective. The love the wife gives her spouse is not directed at the individual, not even an idealised one – that's the danger of what is called life in common, idealisation isn't tenable – but at a being beyond. The love which constitutes the bond of marriage, the love which properly speaking is sacred, flows from the woman towards what Proudhon calls, *all men*. Similarly, through the woman, it is *all women* which the fidelity of the husband is directed towards.

This may seem paradoxical. But in Proudhon *all*<sup>3</sup> isn't *alle*, it isn't a

<sup>3</sup> In the French, 'tous les' (all the): in English, 'all the' can be taken as covering all existing particulars, but since Lacan's point is concerned with universals, we have rendered it as 'all'.

quantity, it is a universal function. It is the universal man, the universal woman, the symbol, the embodiment of the partner of the human couple.

So the pact of speech goes far beyond the individual relation and its imaginary vicissitudes – there's no need to look very deep into experience to grasp it. But there is a conflict between this symbolic pact and the imaginary relations which proliferate spontaneously within every libidinal relation, all the more so when what intervenes belongs to the order of *Verliebtheit*. This conflict subtends, one might say, the great majority of the conflicts in that milieu within which the vicissitude of the bourgeois destiny is unravelled, since it occurs within the humanist perspective of the realisation of the ego, and as a consequence within the alienation proper to the ego. All one needs do is observe to see that this conflict exists, but in order to understand the reason for it, one must go further. Our reference-point will be the anthropological data brought forward by Lévi-Strauss.

You know that the *elementary* structures are naturally the most complicated, and that those which are said to be complex, in the milieu we live in, ostensibly appear to be the most simple. We think ourselves to be free in our conjugal choice, *anyone can marry anyone else*, this is a profound illusion, despite it being inscribed in law. In practice, the choice is guided by preferential elements which, although veiled, are nonetheless essential. The interest of so-called elementary structures is to show us the structure of these preferential elements in all their complexities.

Now, Lévi-Strauss shows that, in the structure of the alliance, the woman, who defines the cultural order as against the natural order, is the exchange object, just as speech, which is in effect the original object of exchange, is. Whatever the goods, the qualities and the statuses which are transmitted along the matrilineal line, whatever the authorities with which a so-called matriarchal order is invested, the symbolic order, in its initial operation, is androcentric. That's a fact.

It is a fact which, of course, hasn't failed to receive all manner of correctives in the course of history, but for all that it remains no less fundamental, and in particular allows us to understand the dissymmetrical position of the woman in the bonds of love, and especially in their most pre-eminently socialised form, namely the conjugal bond.

If these things were seen on their level, and with some rigour, many phantoms would be dispelled just like that.

The modern idea of marriage as a pact of mutual consent is certainly a novelty, introduced within the framework of a religion of salvation, which gives pride of place to the individual soul. It covers over and masks the original structure, the primally sacred nature of marriage. This institution exists today in a compacted form, some features of which are so solid and so tenacious that social revolutions are not about to make its pre-eminence and signification

disappear. But at the same time, some features of the institution have, in history, been erased.

In the course of history, there have always been two contracts, of a very different nature, in this order. For the Romans, for instance, the marriage of people who have a name, who really have one, that of the patricians, the nobles – the *ignobiles* are precisely those who don't have a name – had a highly symbolic character, guaranteed it by ceremonies of a special nature – I do not want to enter into an elaborate description of the *confarreatio*. For the plebeians, there was also a kind of marriage, which was based simply on mutual contract, and constituted what Roman society technically called concubinage. Now it is precisely the institution of concubinage which, starting with a certain wavering in society, was generalised, and, in the final period of Roman history, one even sees concubinage established in the higher strata, with the aim of maintaining an independent social status for the partners, and especially for their goods. In other words, it is when the woman begins to emancipate herself, when she has the right to property as such, when she becomes an individual in society, that the significance of marriage begins to be abraded.

At bottom, the woman is introduced into the symbolic pact of marriage as the object of exchange between – I wouldn't say 'men', although it is men who effectively are supports for it – between lineages, fundamentally androcentric lineages. To understand the various elementary structures is to understand how these objects of exchanges, the women, circulate between these lineages. Judging from experience, this can only happen within an androcentric and patriarchal framework, even when the structure is secondarily caught up in matrilineal ancestries.

The fact that the woman is thus bound up in an order of exchange in which she is object is really what accounts for the fundamentally conflictual character, I wouldn't say without remedy, of her position – the symbolic order literally subdues her, transcends her.

The *all men* of Proudhon is here the universal man, who is both the most concrete and the most transcendent man, and that's the impasse into which the woman is pushed by her specific function in the symbolic order. For her, there's something insurmountable, let us say unacceptable, in the fact of being placed in the position of an object in the symbolic order, to which, on the other hand, she is entirely subjected no less than the man. It is indeed because she has a relation of the second degree to this symbolic order that the god is embodied in man or man in the god, except for conflict, and, of course, there is always conflict.

In other words, in the primitive form of marriage, if a woman isn't given, or doesn't give herself, to a god, to something transcendent, the fundamental relation suffers every form of imaginary degradation, and that is what does happen, because we aren't, and haven't been for a long time, cut out to embody

gods. When times were still hard, there was the master. And that was the great period of the women's rights movement – *The woman isn't an object of property – How is it that adultery is punished in so dissymmetric a manner? Are we slaves?*

After some progress, we've reached the stage of the rival, the relation of the imaginary mode. One mustn't think that our society, through the emancipation of the said women is privileged in this respect. The most naked rivalry between men and women is eternal, and its style is laid down in conjugal relations. Only a few German psychoanalysts believe that the sexual struggle is characteristic of our times. When you've read Livy, you'll know the scandal which a very remarkable trial of a case of poisoning caused in Rome, from whence it transpired that in every patrician family it was par for the course for women to poison their husbands, and that they were dropping off like flies. Feminine rebellion didn't start yesterday.

From master to slave and rival, there is only one dialectical step – the relations of the master to the slave are essentially reversible, and the master sees very quickly his dependency in relation to his slave become established. Today we have come up with a new subtlety, thanks to the introduction of psychoanalytic ideas – the husband has become the child, and for some time now women have been taught to treat him well. Along this path, we've come full circle, we are returning to the state of nature. That's the conception some people entertain of the legitimate intervention of psychoanalysis into what is called human relations, and which, disseminated through the mass media, teaches all and sundry how to behave so that there's peace at home – the woman plays the role of the mother, and the man that of the child.

Having said this, the profound meaning of the myth of Amphitryon, which is so polyvalent, so enigmatic that one can give it a thousand interpretations, is the following – for the situation to be tenable, the position must be triangular. For the couple to keep to the human level, there has to be a god there. Love flows towards the universal man, towards the veiled man, for whom every ideal is only an idolatrous substitute, and this is that famous genital love which makes our Sundays and which we affect to scorn.

Reread what Balint says about this – you'll find that when authors are somewhat rigorous and experimental, they reach the conclusion that this famous love is nothing at all. Genital love turns out to be absolutely unassimilable to a unity that is the fruit of an instinctual maturation. In effect, to the extent that this genital love is conceived as dual, in which any notion of the third party, of speech, of god, is absent, it is fashioned in two pieces. Primo, the genital act, which, as everyone knows, doesn't last long – it's nice but it doesn't last – and it doesn't secure anything. Secundo, tenderness, whose origins are found to be pregenital. Such is the conclusion to which the most fairminded come, when they don't get beyond the dual relation to secure the norm of human relations.

I've reminded you of some basic truths. Now we are going to see what turns up in Plautus and Molière.

## 2

It is a fact that Plautus introduced Sosie – Greek myths aren't ego-based [*moïque*]. But egos exist, and there is one place where the egos quite naturally have their say, in comedy. And it is a comic poet – which isn't to say a funny poet, I think some of you have already thought about this point – who introduces this fundamental novelty, Sosie, from then on inseparable from the myth of Amphitryon.

Sosie is the ego. And the myth shows us how this good little ego of little chaps like you and me behaves in everyday life, what part it plays in the feasts of the gods – a very odd part, since it is always a bit excised from its own pleasure [*jouissance*]. The irresistibly comical side lying at the base of all this has never ceased furnishing the theatre – in the end, it is always a matter of me [*moi*], you and the other.

Well then, how does the ego in question behave? The first time that the ego appears in this drama, he encounters himself at the door, in the guise of what has become Sosie for eternity, the other ego [*l'autre moi*].

I'm going to read the odd bit to you, because you have to have some sense of the sound of it. The first time the ego appears, it encounters me [*moi*]. Who's me? Me, the one who kicks you out. That is what it's about, and that is why the comedy of Amphitryon is so truly exemplary. All you need do is pick at it here and there, study the very style and the language, to realise that those who have introduced this crucial character knew what they were talking about.

In Plautus, where this character comes on stage for the first time, it takes the form of a dialogue in the night, whose gripping and, in a use of the word which should be placed in inverted commas, 'symbolic' nature the text makes you appreciate.

These characters act according to the tradition of asides, so often poorly done when actors play – two characters together on the stage exchange remarks the force of each of which hangs on their being in the nature of an echo or a *quid pro quo*, which amounts to the same thing, which he takes from the remarks the other is independently making. The aside is essential to classical comedy. It is at its very best there.

I couldn't help noticing it, at the Chinese theatre the other day, where it is the gesture which is at its very best. These people speak Chinese and you are no less gripped by everything they show you. For more than a quarter of an hour – it seems like hours – two characters move about the same stage, really giving the impression that they are in two different spaces. With an acrobatic agility, they literally pass through one another. These beings reach one another at every

moment through a gesture which could not miss the adversary and nonetheless does pass by him, because he is already elsewhere. This truly sensational demonstration suggests to one the *miraginary* character of space, but no less leads one to the following characteristic of the symbolic level, that no meeting is ever a shock.

Something of the kind does indeed happen in the play, and especially the first time Sosie comes on the classical stage.

Sosie arrives and meets Sosie.

– *Who goes there?*

– *Me.*

– *Me, who?*

– *Me. Courage, Sosie*, he tells himself, for the former, of course, is the real one, he isn't at ease.

– *What is your fate, tell me?*

– *To be man and speak.* Here is someone who hasn't been coming to the seminars, but bears their trade-mark.

– *Are you master or servant?*

– *Depending how I feel.* This is straight out of Plautus, and it is a very pretty definition of the ego. The fundamental position of the ego confronted with its image is indeed this immediate reversibility of the position of master and servant.

– *Where are you going?*

– *Where I intend to go . . .*

And it goes on –

– *Oh, I do not care for this.*

– *That's music to my ears*, says the imbecile, who naturally expects to receive a thrashing and is already acting smart.

In passing, I can point out to you that this text confirms what I told you about the term *fides*, that it is the equivalent of the phrase *to give one's word*. Mercury promises not to jump on him, and Sosie tells him – *Tuae fide credo, I take your word.*<sup>4</sup> You will also find in the Latin text the *ignobilis* of earlier on, the man without a name.

Let us study the characters in the play, in accordance with a tradition associated with the practice we are criticising, as being just so many embodiments of internal characters.

In Molière's play, Sosie is totally in the foreground, I would even say that he is the only one who matters, he's the one who opens the scene, immediately after Mercury's dialogue paving the way for Jupiter's night. He comes on, good little Sosie, with the victory of his master. He puts down the lantern, and says – *That's Alcmena* and he begins to tell her about Amphitryon's prowess. He is a man who

<sup>4</sup> The French is: 'je crois en ta parole.'

imagines that the object of her desire, the peace of her pleasure [*jouissance*], hangs on his merits. This is the man of the super-ego, who is always wanting to elevate himself to the dignity of the ideals of the father, of the master, and who imagines that that is how he will attain the object of his desire.

But Sosie will never succeed in getting himself heard by Alcmena, because the ego's fate, by its very nature, is to always find its reflection confronting it, which dispossess it of all it wishes to attain. This sort of shadow, which is simultaneously rival, master, sometime slave, keeps it at a distance from what is fundamentally at stake, namely the recognition of desire.

On this point, the Latin text has some striking formulae, in the course of this priceless dialogue in which Mercury, by using force, obliges Sosie to abandon his identity, to renounce his own name. And just as Galileo says – *And yet, the earth does move*, Sosie always comes back to it – *Yet, I am Sosie*, and he has this wonderful line – *By Pollux, tu me alienabis numquam, you will never make me other*, *quin noster siem, than am ours*. The Latin text indicates perfectly the alienation of the ego and the support it finds in the *we*, in its belonging to the order in which its master is a great general.

Enter Amphitryon, the real master, Sosie's guarantor, who will put things in order. What is remarkable is precisely that Amphitryon will also be had just as much, duped just as much, as Sosie himself. He doesn't understand a thing Sosie is telling him, that is, that he has met another me [*moi*].

– *What patience I must resort to!*  
  *But tell me, did you enter the house?*  
– *Enter, yes. But in what way? [ . . . ]*  
– *So how?*  
– *With a stick*  
  *Which my back still feels the terrible pain of.*

...  
– *Who?*  
– *Me.*  
– *You, fighting yourself [Toi, te battre?]*  
– *Yes, me; not the me here,*  
  *But the me from the house, who swipes like four men.*  
... *I've seen evidence of it,*  
  *And this devil of a me thrashed me good and proper.*

...  
– *Me, I tell you.*  
– *Who me?*  
– *This me who rained blows on me.*

And then Amphitryon rains blows on poor Sosie. In other words, he analyses his negative transference for him. He teaches him what an ego must be. He must reintegrate into his ego his ego-properties.

Racy and indescribable scenes. I could give many more quotations, which always show the same contradiction in the subject between the symbolic and the real plane. Sosie effectively starts doubting whether he is himself because Mercury told him something very special – what he was doing when no one could see him. Sosie, astonished at what Mercury tells him about his own behaviour, begins to give in a little.

– *And me I am beginning to doubt in earnest . . .*

It is just as remarkable in the Latin text.

– *Now I recognise my own image, which I have often seen in the mirror, in speculum.*

And he enumerates the symbolic historical qualities of his identity, as in Molière. But the contradiction which is also on the imaginary level splits asunder – *equidem certo idem sum qui semper fui, Nonetheless I am the same man as has always been*. And then, an appeal to the imaginary elements of intimacy with the gods. After all, I have already seen this house, it is clearly the same – recourse to the intuitive certitude, which however is susceptible to being out of kilter. The *déjà-vu*, the *déjà-reconnu*, the *déjà-éprouvé*, often enter into conflict with the certainties which emanate from recollection and history. Some see the phenomena of depersonalisation as being the premonitory signs of disintegration, when it is by no means necessary to possess a predisposition to psychosis to have experienced a thousand times over similar kinds of feelings, whose mainspring is to be found in the relation of the symbolic to the imaginary.

Just when Sosie accepts his confusion, his dispossession, Amphitryon gives him some supportive psychotherapy. Don't let's say that Amphitryon is in the position of the psychoanalyst. Let's be content with saying that he can be symbolic of it, in so far as in relation to his object – in so far as the object of his love, his far off princess, is psychoanalysis – the psychoanalyst occupies, to put it politely, the exiled position which is that of Amphitryon at his own door. But the victim of this spiritual cuckoldry is the patient.

### 3

Every Tom, Dick and Harry – and Lord knows that I've had enough testimony – thinks he has reached the uttermost depths of the analytic experience by having had some fantasies of *Verliebtheit*, of infatuation, about the person who opens the door at his analyst's – it isn't that rare to hear such testimony, although here I'm alluding to very specific cases. In his encounter with this alleged analytic experience, the subject will be fundamentally dispossessed, will be had.

In everyday chat, in the world of language as it's taken for granted, in the world of the commonly accepted misunderstanding, the subject doesn't know what he is saying – at every moment, the sheer fact that we speak shows that

we don't know that. The very foundation of analysis clearly lies in our telling a thousand times more than it would take to get our heads chopped off. We don't know what we are saying, but we do address it to someone – someone who is miraginary and endowed with an ego. Because speech is propagated in a straight line, as I said last time, we have the illusion that this speech comes from the location we give to our own ego, rightly separated off, in the schema which I left on the drawing-board last time, frqm all the other egos.

As Giraudoux's Jupiter points out when he tries to find out from Mercury what men are – *Man is the character who is always asking if he exists*, and he's quite right, and there's only one thing wrong, which is his answering yes. In relation to all the others, the privilege his ego has is that it's the only one which he can be sure exists when he questions himself – and Lord knows he does question himself. Essentially, there he is, all alone. And it is because speech is received from this ego that the subject enters into the sweet illusion that this ego is in a unique position.

If the analyst thinks that he has to answer from there, *a'*, he ratifies the function of the ego, which is precisely what dispossesses the subject of himself. He says to him – *Go back into your ego* – or rather – *Stuff everything back into it, everything you let escape from it. Those guts, those limbs of yours you were taking stock of when faced with the other Sosie, reintegrate them now, eat them. Reconstitute yourself in the fullness of these drives you fail to recognise.*

But that's not the point. The point is for the subject to get to know what he's saying, get to know who's speaking from there, *S*, and to this end, to become aware of the essentially imaginary character of what is said in that place when the absolute transcendent Other is invoked, this Other to be found in language each time speech endeavours to be uttered.

Let us take the concrete example of the obsessional. The fatal influence of the ego is brought to a maximum in him. There is no danger of madness, no unleashing of the symbol behind the obsession, as some theoreticians tell us. The obsessional subject isn't the same as the schizoid subject who, in some way, speaks directly at the level of his drives. It is the ego in so far as it bears within itself its dispossession, it is imaginary death. If the obsessional mortifies himself, it is because more than any other neurotic, he binds himself to his ego, which bears within itself dispossession and imaginary death.

But why? It's obvious – the obsessional is always an other. Whatever he tells you, whatever feelings he brings to you, it is always those of someone other than himself. This objectification of himself isn't due to an inclination or to a gift for introspection. It is to the extent that he evades his own desire that all desire to which, were it only ostensibly, he commits himself, will be represented by him as the desire of this other self that is his ego.

And it isn't chiming in with this to plan to reinforce his ego? to allow it its various drives, its orality, its anality, its later oral stage, and its primary anal

stage? to teach him to recognise what he wants, which we know from the start, the destruction of the other? And how could this not be the destruction of the other, since it is the destruction of himself which is the issue, which is exactly the same thing?

Before enabling him to recognise the fundamental aggressivity which he disperses and refracts into the world, which structures all his object relations, he must be made to understand what the function of this fatal relation he maintains with himself is, which makes it such that as soon as a feeling is his he starts annulling it. If an obsessional tells you that he doesn't care for something or someone, you can take it that it touches him to the quick. When he expresses great indifference, that is when his interest is caught at its maximum.

To act in such a way that the obsessional recognises himself in the decomposed image of himself which he presents to us in the more or less explicit, degraded, loose form of his aggressive drives, is no doubt essential, but the key to the cure isn't to be found in this dual relation with himself. The interpretation of his fatal relation to himself only carries weight if you get him to understand the function.

He isn't dead to himself, nor in actual fact [*réellement*]. For whom is he dead? For the person who is his master. And in relation to what? In relation to the object of his pleasure [*jouissance*]. He effaces his pleasure so as not to arouse the anger of his master. But, on the other hand, if he is dead, or if he presents himself as such, he is no longer here, it's someone other than himself who has a master and, inversely, he himself has another master. It follows that he is always somewhere else. In so far as he desires, he splits himself [*se dédouble*] indefinitely into a series of characters, which the Fairbairns turn into an enrapturing discovery. Within the psychology of the subject, there are, Fairbairn notes, many more than just the three characters Freud talks of, the *id*, *super-ego* and *ego*, you'll always stumble on at least two others. But you can still find others, as in a silvered mirror – if you look carefully, there isn't just one image, but a second one, which splits, and if the silver is thick enough, there are ten, twenty, an infinity. Similarly, to the extent that the subject annulls himself, mortifies himself when confronted with his master, he is still an other, since he is always there, an other with another master and another slave, etc. The object of his desire equally suffers an automatic split [*dédoulement*], as I showed in my commentary on the *Ratman*, as well as on the basis of my detailed account of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. What the obsessional hangs on to is always other, for if he truly recognised it, he would be cured.

Analysis doesn't progress, as we are assured, through a kind of auto-observation by the subject, founded on the famous splitting<sup>5</sup> of the *ego* which would thus be essential to the analytic situation. The observation is an

<sup>5</sup> English in the original.

observation of observation, and so on, which simply perpetuates the fundamentally ambiguous relation of the ego. Analysis progresses through the speech of the subject in so far as it passes beyond the dual relation, and thus no longer encounters anything except the absolute Other, whom the subject doesn't know how to recognise. He has to reintegrate this speech progressively in him, that is to say to finally speak to the absolute Other from there where he is, from there where his ego must come to be, by reintegrating the paranoid composition of his drives of which it isn't sufficient to say that he doesn't recognise himself in them – essentially, as an ego, he fails to recognise [*méconnait*] them.

In other words, what Sosie has to learn isn't that he has never encountered his double [*sosie*] – it is unqualifiedly true that he did encounter him. What he has to learn is that he is Amphitryon, the gentleman full of glory who understands nothing about nothing, not a thing about what one desires, who thinks that it is enough to be a victorious general to make love to one's wife. This fundamentally alienated gentleman, who never does encounter the object of his desires, has yet to realise why he cleaves fundamentally to this ego, and how this ego is his fundamental alienation. He has yet to become aware of this profound twinship, which is also one of the essential viewpoints of *Amphitryon*, and on two levels – that of these doubles who mirror one another, and that of the gods. From a double love, Alcmena engenders a double fruit. Alcmena is far more prominent in Plautus – with time we have acquired a degree of modesty which prevents us from going very deeply into things.

By means of this dramatic, if not psychodramatic, demonstration, which is what the myth of Amphitryon amounts to for us, at least, I wanted to give you a sense today of the extent to which the vital problems which we address ourselves to are inscribed within the register of a traditional way of thinking. But that doesn't prevent me from advising you to look for the evidence of the psychologic illusion I denounce in the very writings of the authors who sustain it. You'll find a very pretty example of it in this Fairbairn I mentioned to you the other day.

#### 4

It's not an obsessional case, but rather a woman who has a real genital abnormality – she has a very tiny vagina, which has been left untouched, she is a virgin, and there is no uterus corresponding to this very tiny vagina. That is more or less certain, although, on account of a singular timidity, the matter has never been made absolutely clear. At least when it comes to the secondary sexual characteristics, the abnormality is striking, according to certain specialists, who have gone so far as to say that it is an instance of pseudo-hermaphroditism, and that in reality she was a man. Such is the subject which our Fairbairn takes into analysis.

The kind of grand scale with which the whole of the case's unfolding is discussed is really worth noticing. Without batting an eyelid, he tells us that this subject, a personality of evident quality, has learnt that something wasn't going quite right, that her situation is very peculiar in relation to the reality of the sexes. She has learnt that all the more so on account of there being six or seven girls in the family in the same position. So, one knows what's what, one knows that on this point the women are put together somewhat oddly. She tells herself that it's unique, and she is pleased about it—*This way*, she tells herself, *I'll miss out on a lot of worries*. And she duly becomes a teacher.

Then, slowly, she becomes aware that, far from being discharged of nature's burdens owing to the fact that all her pleasure [*jouissance*] comes from a purely spiritual act, funny things happen—nothing is ever right, things never go well enough. She is horribly tyrannised by her scruples. And when she gets rather run down in the middle of the second term, she has a bout of depression.

The analyst plans, above all else, to reintegrate her drives for her, that is to say to get her to become aware of her phallic complex—what do you know, it's true. It is discovered that there is a relation between the fact that she affects<sup>6</sup> certain men, that the proximity of certain men has an effect on her, and the bouts of depression. From that, the analyst deduces that she would like to hurt them, and for months he gets her to reintegrate this aggressive drive. Throughout the whole of this period, he tells himself—*Good gracious me, she does learn all this amazingly well!* What he is waiting for is for her to come up with what he calls feelings of guilt. And eventually, he is successful.

What is really most remarkable is that he gives an account of the progress of the analysis on the day that he makes the following observation—she has finally got to her feeling of guilt, that is to say now it's all very simple, she can no longer get close to a man without this triggering bouts of guilt which, this time, have substance.

In other words, in conformity with the schema we looked at the other day, the analyst gave her—firstly, an ego, he apprised her as to what she really wanted, namely to cut men down to size—secondly, he has given her a super-ego, namely that all of this is really very naughty, and that what is more it is absolutely forbidden to get close to these men. That is what the author calls the paranoid stage of the analysis. I'm quite prepared to believe it—he is very good at teaching her where these drives are, and now she sees them all over the place.

Is this really the right tack? Is what these bouts of depression are concerned with to be located in this dual relation, with all that that involves on the schema of regression?

And yet the author has the thing within his grasp. The depressive qualities of

<sup>6</sup> English in the original.

the images of men are linked to the fact that men, that's her. It is her own image in so far as it has been taken away from her, and it has this decomposing action on her, disconcerting in the original sense of the word. When she comes close to these men, it is her own image, her narcissistic image, her ego, she comes close to. That is the basis of the depressive position. And the situation would certainly be more difficult for her than for anyone else, since she is very specifically in an ambiguous position, one which has its place in teratology. But any kind of narcissistic identification is as such ambiguous.

There is no better illustration of the function of *Penisneid* – it is in so far as she identifies with the imaginary man that the penis takes on a symbolic value, and that there's a problem. It would be entirely incorrect, the author tells us, to think that *Penisneid* is entirely natural in women. Who told him it was natural? Of course it's symbolic. It is in so far as the woman is in a symbolic order with an androcentric perspective that the penis takes on this value. Besides, it isn't the penis, but the phallus, that is to say something whose symbolic usage is possible because it can be seen, because it is erected. There can be no possible symbolic use for what is not seen, for what is hidden.

For this woman, the function of *Penisneid* is fully operative, since she doesn't know who she is, whether she is man or woman, and she is totally absorbed by the question of her symbolic signification. And this real anomaly is doubled up by something else which perhaps has some relation to this teratological apparition, namely that in her family the masculine side is effaced. It is her mother's father who plays the role of the more elevated character, and it is in relation to him that the triangle is established in a typical way, and the question raised as to her phallicisation or not.

All this is completely passed over in the theory and in the conduct of the treatment, in the name of the following, that what is at issue is to get the subject to recognise her drives, and in particular, because in truth those are the only ones one comes across, those drives known in our elegant language as *pregenital*. This solid investigation of the pregenital leads to a phase which the therapist comes to call paranoid. We shouldn't be surprised by that. Taking the imaginary for the real is what characterises paranoia, and by failing to recognise [*méconnaître*] the imaginary register, we bring the subject to recognise his partial drives in the real.

Here, the subject's relations with men, up to then narcissistic and which were already not that simple, become inter-aggressive, which complicates them no end. Taking the path of guilt which it was extraordinarily difficult to instigate, does not bode well for the supplementary detours which will be necessary so that the subject may return to a more pacific course.

You don't have to look very far to find the practical sanction for a theoretical error. In this respect, this an exemplary illustration. One of the secret mainsprings for the failure of the treatments of obsessionalists is the idea that

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there's a latent psychosis behind the obsessional neurosis. It isn't surprising that one then ends up with latent disassociations, and that one substitutes periodic depressions, even a psychic hypochondriacal inclination, for the obsessional neurosis.

Perhaps that is not the best one can do.

However panoramic our comments may be, you must be aware that they have the most precise repercussions, not only for the understanding of cases, but for technique.

*8 June 1955*

# FINALE

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# XXII

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## Where is speech? Where is language?

THE APOLOGUE OF THE MARTIAN  
THE APOLOGUE OF THE THREE PRISONERS

The lecture announced for next Wednesday at 10.30 won't be followed by a seminar. We will have a final session the following week, in case the paper raises questions you would like to hear me discuss. The lecture I just mentioned will in fact be given before a larger audience, and I shan't be able to express myself then in the terms in which I express myself here, which takes for granted acquaintance with our earlier work.

Today, I would like us to talk a bit, so that I get some sense of where you have got to. I would like, as we have already done once before, the greatest possible number of you to raise the questions that in your opinion remain open. I have the impression they're not in short supply, since we try to open up questions here, rather than close them again. So then, what question has been opened up for you by this year's seminar?

MLLE X: *I'm not sure of the way in which you locate the symbolic and the imaginary.*

What sense do you have of it, after having heard some of the seminar?

MLLE X: *I think that the imaginary has more to do with the subject, with his way of receiving, whereas the symbolic order is more impersonal.*

Yes, that's true and it isn't.

### 1

It's my turn to ask you a question. At the point we have reached, what economic function do I give to language and speech in the schema? What relation do they have? What difference? It is a very simple question, but it still deserves an answer.

DR GRANOFF: *Language would be the frieze of the imaginary, and speech, full speech, the symbolic landmark, would be the small island starting from which any message can be reconstructed or rather deciphered.*

O. MANNONI: *I'd say for brevity's sake, that language is geometrical, speech is perspective, and the point of perspective is always an other. Language is a reality, it is geometrical, that is to say that it isn't put into perspective, and belongs to no one, whereas speech is a perspective in this geometry, whose centre of perspective, the vanishing point, is always an ego. Within language, there is no ego.*

Are you sure of that?

O. MANNONI: *Language is a universe. Speech is a cut through this universe, which is exactly tied to the position of the speaking subject. Language may have a meaning, but only speech has a signification. One understands the meaning of Latin, but Latin isn't speech [une parole].*

When one understands Latin, one understands the manner in which the various lexicological and grammatical elements are organised, the manner in which the significations refer to each other, the employment of usages. And why do you say that the system of egos doesn't exist in that? On the contrary, they are entirely comprehended within it.

O. MANNONI: *I'm thinking of quite an old joke about the baccalauréat, in which a false candidate is taken for a candidate. The examiner shows him an exam paper – But you wrote this. It's called Letter to Seneca. And the guy says – But, sir, am I the kind of guy to write to Seneca? He looks at things in the perspective of speech. At the limit he could translate the version, but he says – It isn't me, it isn't my speech. Obviously, it is a farcical situation. But it seems to me to have this meaning. If I read a letter not knowing who sent it, nor to whom, I can understand it, I am in the world of language.*

When someone shows you a letter to Seneca, it is obviously you who wrote it. The example you've suggested has the very opposite meaning to what you are claiming. If we immediately take up our place in the game of the diverse intersubjectivities, that's because we are in our place anywhere. The world of language is possible in so far as we have our place in it anywhere.

O. MANNONI: *When there's speech [une parole].*

Precisely, that's the whole question, is that sufficient to yield speech? The foundation of the analytic experience is that not every manner of introducing oneself into language is equally efficacious, isn't equally this body of being, this *corpse of being*,<sup>1</sup> which makes the existence of psychoanalysis possible, which makes it such that not every random bit of language has the same value for the subject.

DR GRANOFF: *Language is from no one to no one, and speech from someone to someone else. Because speech is constitutive and language is constituted.*

<sup>1</sup> Phrase in English in the original.

DR PERRIER: *In the present state of things, what matters is to introduce the economic problem of language into speech. And to that end I suggest the following – I'm not sure if I'm right – that there would no longer be an economic problem to the extent that the signifying situation of the subject were clearly formulated in all its dimensions, and in particular in its triangular dimensions, with the aid of speech. If language becomes full speech, three-dimensional, the economic factor will no longer be at issue on the level of the quantities channelled into an analysis, quantities of affects or instincts, and will simply become the substratum again, the engine of whatever is brought completely naturally into the situation, to the extent that one has become aware of it in all its dimensions.*

I note a word which you used in several ways – dimension.

DR LECLAIRE: *The answer which occurs to me is the following. It is a formula – language has the function of communication, even of transmission, and speech, for its part, has a function of foundation, even of revelation.*

M. ARENSBURG: *So it would be via the intermediary of speech that language could acquire its economic role. Is that what you mean?*

DR PERRIER: *No, I'm talking about the reinsertion of the economy into the symbolic order, via the intermediary of speech.*

The key word in cybernetics is *message*. That's what language is made for, but it isn't a code, it is essentially ambiguous, semantemes are always polysemantemes, signifiers always have several, sometimes extremely disjointed, significations. The sentence, though, has one unique meaning, what I mean is that it can't be lexicalised – one makes dictionaries of words, of word usages or locutions, but one doesn't make a dictionary of sentences. Hence, some of the ambiguities tied to the semantic element are reabsorbed in the context, through usage and the utterance of the sentence. The theory of communication, in as much as it tries to formalise this theme and to isolate out units, refers rather to codes, which in principle avoid the ambiguities – it isn't possible to confuse one sign from the code with another, except in error. We thus find ourselves confronted with language, confronted with a primary category whose function in relation to the message is not a simple one. Now, this introduction still leaves opaque the question of the message. In your opinion, just like that, spontaneously, what's a message?

M. MARCHANT: *The transmission of information.*

What is information?

M. MARCHANT: *Any kind of indication.*

MME AUDRY: *It's something sent by someone addressed to some else.*

M. MARCHANT: *That's a communication and not a message.*

MME AUDRY: *I think that's the essence of a message, a transmitted announcement.*

M. MARCHANT: *Message and communication are not the same things.*

MME AUDRY: *In its standard meaning, a message is something transmitted to someone, to let him know of something.*

M. MARCHANT: *The message is unidirectional. Communication isn't unidirectional, there's coming and going.*

MME AUDRY: *I said that the message is from someone to someone else.*

M. MARCHANT: *The message is sent from someone to someone else. Communication is what occurs once the message is exchanged.*

DR GRANOFF: *The message is a programme one puts into a universal machine, and after a while it retrieves whatever it can from it.*

What he is saying isn't bad.

M. LEFORT: *It is the enlarging of the symbolic world.*

M. MARCHANT: *No, it is the shrinking of the symbolic world. With language as backdrop, speech will choose.*

Mme Colette Audry introduces the necessity of subjects with respect to the message.

MME AUDRY: *A message isn't just direct. It may be carried by a messenger who has got nothing to do with it. The messenger may not know what the message contains.*

M. MARCHANT: *It may also be transmitted from machine to machine.*

MME AUDRY: *But in every case there is a point of departure and a point of arrival.*

Sometimes, the messenger is confused with the message. If he has something written on his scalp, he can't read it, even in the mirror, to get at the message he has to be shaved. In this case, is that the image of the message in itself? Is a messenger who has a message written under his hair himself a message?

M. MARCHANT: *I would say yes.*

MME AUDRY: *It's obviously a message.*

O. MANNONI: *There is no need for it to be received.*

M. MARCHANT: *In general, messages are sent and received. But between the two, that's a message.*

MME AUDRY: *A bottle in the sea is a message. It is addressed, it doesn't have to arrive, but it is addressed.*

M. MARCHANT: *It is a signification in motion.*

It isn't a signification, but a sign in motion. Now we still have to find out what a sign is.

M. MARCHANT: *It is something one exchanges.*

DR LECLAIRE: *The message is objective speech.*

Certainly not!

## 2

I will give you an apologue so as to try and put some landmarks in place.

The man known as Wells is commonly thought to have had a somewhat primitive mind. In actual fact, he was quite ingenious, he knew very well what he was doing, what he was refusing and what he was choosing, within the system of thought and behaviour.

I can't recall very clearly in which one of his works he imagines two or three scientists having reached Mars. There, they come upon beings who have modes of communication all their own, and they are very surprised to understand the messages modulated to them. They are amazed, and then, they discuss it together. One says – *He told me that he was doing some research on electronic physics.* The other says – *Yes, he told me that he was working on what constitutes the essence of solid bodies.* And the third one says – *He told me that he was working on metre in poetry and the function of rhyme.*

That is what happens every time we engage in private or public discourse. Does this short story illustrate language or speech?

MME AUDRY: *Both.*

DR GRANOFF: *To my knowledge, there aren't a large number of universal machines. Suppose you run a programme through one. You have to take into account not only the machine, but also the operators. You run a programme, it's a message. On output, one says – the machine is on the blink, or else – it isn't on the blink. In the sense that from the moment when the machine restores a communication, from the moment when someone can receive it – and it can't be received if the operator hasn't understood it – if he finds it well-formed, if he understands it, if he accepts it as valid, if he considers the machine to have been functioning properly, the message has become a communication.*

M. MARCHANT: *But in that case, all three have understood, but differently.*

O. MANNONI: *Not differently. If a mathematician writes out equations on a blackboard, one person might say it's magnetism, and another something else. These equations are true for both of them.*

That's completely off.

M. RIGUET: *I think that it's language, quite simply.*

DR LECLAIRE: *I have the feeling that the discussion has taken a specific turn as a result of our discussion of cybernetics.*

It is an opportunity to gauge a bit where you've got to.

DR LECLAIRE: *If, within this perspective, we are, relatively speaking, capable of locating language, I think it far harder, for us, at least for the time being, to locate speech. Now, earlier on, when I was talking of speech, I was talking about it in a specific sense – when I talk of speech, I always mean speech. I would like you to tell us a bit about the pole of speech, so that we can at least gauge the level of the discussion.*

M. MARCHANT: *In any case can we separate speech from language when they become manifest?*

What do you make of all this, Father Beirnaert?

FATHER BEIRNAERT: *Like Riguet I also thought it was language, so I haven't understood a thing.*

M. RIGUET: *We have each understood it in our own way.*

MME AUDRY: *It is even more complicated than that. One would first have to see what the Martian wanted to say.*

We will never know what the Martian wanted to say. If we put ourselves on the side on which the emission of words remains vague, it can't be said that speech and language are confounded with one another.

M. MARCHANT: *So, you make language disappear, and then you catch us out on it.*

I admit that this analogue deserves some clarification. There is a substitute for language in this analogue, which is the possibility of the three individuals comprehending. The speech they receive operates on this language. The problem is that there is no code.

What this analogue means is this – it is in a world of language that each man has to recognise a calling, a vocation, which happens to be revealed to him. Someone spoke just now of revelation and foundation, and that is indeed what it is about. We are faced with a world of language, which every now and then, gives us the impression that there is something essentially neutralising, uncertain about it. There isn't one philosopher who hasn't insisted, and rightly so, on the fact that the very possibility of error is tied to the existence of language. Each subject doesn't simply have to take cognisance of the world, as if it all happened on the level of noetics, he has to find his way about in it. If

psychoanalysis means anything, it is that he is already engaged in something which has a relation with language without being identical to it, and that he has to find his way about in it – the universal discourse.

The concrete, universal discourse, which has been unfolding since the beginning of time, is what has truly been said or rather really been said – to fix our ideas, we can get to that point. The subject locates himself as such in relation to that, he is inscribed in it, that is how he is already determined, by a determination belonging to a totally different register from that of the determinations of the real, of the material metabolisms which caused him to come forth into this semblance of existence which is life. His function, in so far as he continues this discourse, is to rediscover his place in it, not simply as orator, but, here and now, as entirely determined by it.

I have often underlined that already before his birth, the subject is already located not only as sender, but as an atom of concrete discourse. He is in the chorus line of this discourse, he himself is, if you prefer, a message. A message has been written on his head, and he is entirely located in the succession of messages, Each of his choices is a speech.

I appealed to Father Beirnaert for help, because of the *in principio erat verbum*. One day you said that *fides* was in your opinion the best translation for speech. It is odd that the religious translation doesn't say *in principio erat fides*. *Verbum*, that's language, and even the word. In the Greek text, *logos* is also language, and not speech. After that, God made use of speech – *Let there be light*, he said.

Let's try to get a little closer to the manner in which man comes into [s'intéresse], in the sense of *inter-esse*, speech. We certainly feel the necessity of distinguishing between a message, in the sense of sign, a wandering sign, and the manner in which man gets in on it. If he is himself integrated into the universal discourse, it isn't after all in the same way as the messages which wander the world in bottles or on scalps. From the point of view of Sirius, maybe they are the same, but for us that's not possible. In any case, what concerns us is to know the difference.

M. RIGUET: *May I put two or three things on the blackboard? I would simply like to try in a few minutes to explain first, what mathematicians understand by language.*

Consider the set of all the words which can be formed by using these letters – ab, ac, ca, ad, and abdd, bb, etc. I place the letters one after another in any kind of order, repetitions being permitted. I can form all these words indefinitely. Amongst these words, take a sub-set WF – well-formed<sup>2</sup> – words formed with the help of these symbols. And a mathematical theory consists in the data of a certain sub-set, these are called axioms, and a set of rules of deduction, which will for instance be of a syntactic kind. If, inside one word, I find the symbol ab, I will have for instance the option of replacing it by p. Thus, starting off with the word, abcd, I will be able to form the word

<sup>2</sup> English in the original.

pcd. *These are theorems, that is, the set of all the words which I can form on the basis of the axioms with the aid of the productions of syntax. This, WF, is called a language.*

*The choice of symbols, a, b, c, d, is of course arbitrary. I could have chosen others, u, v, x, y, and thus have generated a theory isomorphic with the first. In actual fact, for mathematicians, the notion of language is pretty nearly defined by an isomorphism. What's more – it is pretty nearly defined by a coding, for if one considers the set of symbols constituted by 0 and 1, I can let a = 00, b = 01, c = 10, d = 11, and translate all the syntactic products and the axioms as functions of the symbols 0 and 1. But I will have to be careful when I want to retrieve the old theory by decoding the new one, for if I code a certain word 00010111001, the decoding will sometimes yield an ambiguity. If e = 000, I won't know if this word begins with a or with e, etc.*

*It seems to me that your definition of symbols is not the same as this. For you, symbols are tied to another language. You have a kind of basic language of communication, a kind of universal language, and the symbols you speak of are always coded in function of this basic language.*

What strikes me in what you have just said, if I've properly understood it – I think I've understood it – is this – when one illustrates the phenomenon of language with something as formally purified as mathematical symbols – and that is one of the reasons for putting cybernetics on the agenda – when one gives a mathematical notation of the *verbum*, one demonstrates in the simplest possible way that language exists completely independently of us. Numbers have properties which are absolute. They are, whether we're here or not. 1729 will always be the sum of two cubes, the smallest number which is the sum of two different pairs of cubes.

All this can circulate in all manner of ways in the universal machine, which is more universal than anything you could imagine. One can imagine an indefinite number of levels, where all this turns around and circulates. The world of signs functions, and it has no signification whatsoever.

What gives it its signification is the moment when we stop the machine. These are the temporal breaks which we make in it. If they are faulty, we will see ambiguities emerge, which are sometimes difficult to resolve, but which one will always end up giving a signification to.

M. RIGUET: *I don't think so, for these cuts may be made by another machine, and there's nothing to say that a man will be able to decipher what will come out of this new machine.*

That is perfectly true. Nonetheless, it is the temporal element, the intervention of a scansion permitting the insertion of something which can take on meaning for a subject.

M. RIGUET: *Yes, but it seems to me that in addition there's this universe of symbols, belonging to mankind in common.*

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What we have just said is that it doesn't in any way belong specifically to it.

M. RIGUET: *Precisely, machines don't have a common universe of symbols.*

That's very delicate, because we build these machines. In fact, that doesn't matter. It is enough to note that by means of your 0 and your 1, that is, the connotation of presence-absence, we are capable of representing everything which presents itself, everything which has been brought about by a determinate historical process, everything which has been developed in mathematics. We are in perfect agreement. All the properties of numbers are there, in these numbers written with binary numbers. Of course, that isn't how one discovers them. It took the invention of symbols, for instance, which made us take a giant step forward the day it was simply inscribed on a bit of paper. We were left for centuries with our mouths open when faced with equations of the second degree without being able to get it out, and it is through writing it down that an advance was made.

We thus find ourselves confronted with the problematic situation, that there is in fact a reality of signs within which there exists a world of truth entirely deprived of subjectivity, and that, on the other hand, there has been a historical development of subjectivity manifestly directed towards the rediscovery of truth, which lies in the order of symbols.

Who doesn't understand a word of this?

M. MARCHANT: *I don't agree. You defined language, and I think that it is the best definition, as a world of signs to which we are strangers.*

This language here.

M. MARCHANT: *I think that it is true of language in general.*

Not so. For language is completely burdened with our history, it is as contingent as this sign, and what is more it is ambiguous.

M. MARCHANT: *I think the notion of error cannot be applied to language when it is conceived like that.*

There is no error in the world of zeros.

M. MARCHANT: *But in the world of language, it doesn't mean anything any longer. There are true and false things. You speak of research we are engaged in. At this moment, error and truth are determined. But the world of mathematical symbols is already a bit peculiar, as language.*

In the system of language as it exists, I can manage to spot the error as such. If I tell you *elephants live in water*, I can, through a series of syllogisms, refute this error.

**M. MARCHANT:** *It is already a sentence, a message, a communication which may be false. If one defines every language as a world of signs which exists independently of us, the notion of error cannot be located at this level, but at a higher level, where messages become manifest. Communication and speech are not on the same level. I place language on a lower level, on the basis of which communication, messages and speech become manifest. In my opinion, language must be restricted to a level almost of undifferentiation. If one starts wanting to decipher the meaning of a language, it no longer applies. One can only decipher the meaning of speech. It may have several, and that in fact is its role.*

This is what I am aiming at. I'm showing you that the question of meaning comes with speech.

**M. MARCHANT:** *Of course; but not with language. Language enables a meaning to be established and for speech to become manifest.*

Two things should be borne in mind. Language as embodied historically, which is that of our community, French, for instance, and then, there is this language here. The important thing is for us to realise that there is something which we can attain in its purity, where laws already have a palpable existence, laws which are completely undeciphered until we intervene to give them some meaning. And what meaning?

**M. MARCHANT:** *Oh, no! Absolutely no way!*

The meaning of something that engages us completely. It is the way in which we introduce ourselves into the temporal succession. What's involved is knowing what time is involved.

**MISS X:** *I think some of Piaget's ideas may be relevant here. He defines the essential feature of formal thought in terms of possibility rather than in terms of the real. But within the notion of possibilities themselves, he makes a distinction between what he calls the possible structure, which corresponds to the objective structures of thought, and what he calls materially possible, that is, which must receive a function from the consciousness of the subject.*

But there's absolutely no need for thinking here, the circulation of binary signs in a machine enables us, if we give it the right programme, to discover a previously unpublished prime number. The prime number circulating in the machine has got nothing to do with thought.

**MISS X:** *Piaget isn't talking about thought, but about the objective structure which finds the solution to the problem, the structure of the machine in the organism, that is to say, in the case of the human being, the structure of the brain.*

These problems aren't on the same level as what concerns us here.

MISS X: *One could say that speech is intercalated as the element of revelation between universal discourse and language.*

M. LEFÈBRE-PONTALIS: *I'm not sure whether I am following this clearly. I have the impression that we are making a very radical break between language and speech, which doesn't mean a lot to me, for in the end, if there were no speech, there would be no language. In the *apologue* we heard earlier on, it seemed to me that language was ambiguous by definition, and that one cannot say that it is a universe of signs which assumes a relatively completed closed cycle, to which one would turn in order to draw out this or that signification. In the face of such an ambiguity, the person who receives the speech reveals his preferences.*

As soon as language exists – and the question is precisely to know what minimum number of signs is needed to make a language – there is a concrete universe. All the significations must find a place in it. There is no instance of a language in which entire zones are untranslatable. Everything which we know as signification is always embodied in a system which is [a] universe of language. As soon as language exists, it is [a] universe.

M. LEFÈBRE-PONTALIS: *But one can invert this conclusion without twisting it and say that the most impoverished language allows everything to be communicated. But that doesn't mean to say that all the significations are already set down in a language.*

That is why I distinguished language and significations. Language is [a] system of signs, and, as such, [a] complete system. With that, one can do anything.

M. LEFÈBRE-PONTALIS: *On condition that there be speaking subjects.*

Of course. The question is to know what the function of the speaking subject is in all this.

3

I am going to turn to another *apologue*, perhaps clearer than that of Wells, because it was designed especially with the aim of distinguishing the imaginary from the symbolic. It's mine.

Three prisoners are put to a test. One of them is to be freed, but as all three are equally deserving, it is not clear which one should benefit from this unique act of mercy. They are told – *Here are three white discs and two black ones. Each of you will have one of these discs attached to his back, and you are going to have to work out for yourself so as to be able to tell us which one you have been stuck with. Obviously there is no mirror, and it isn't in your interest to communicate, since all it needs is for one of you to have revealed to another what he has got on his back for him to gain by it.*

So each of them has a disc on his back. All any one of them sees is the way the two others are connotated by these discs.

They are each given a white disc. How is each subject going to reason?

This story enables one to demonstrate the storeys, the dimensions, as Perrier was saying earlier on, of time. There are three temporal dimensions, which deserve to be pointed out, for they have never really been distinguished. It isn't inconceivable that all three of them realise very quickly that they each have white discs on. But if one wants to set it into discourse, it will necessarily be in the following way. There is a fundamental given of the order of 0 and of the small 1s – if one of them were to see two black discs on the backs of the others, there would not be the least bit of doubt, since there are only two blacks, and he could get moving. That is a given of eternal logic, and the grasping of it is perfectly instantaneous – it is just a matter of seeing. But the thing is, each of them doesn't see two black discs and for a good reason, namely that there is no black disc at all. Each of them sees only two white discs.

Nonetheless, the thing one doesn't see plays a decisive role in the speculation whereby the characters can take the step towards the door.

Seeing two white discs, each subject has to say to himself that one of the two others must see either two white discs or else one white and one black one. What's really involved is each of the subject's thinking what the other two must think, and in a completely reciprocal manner. Obviously, for each of the subjects, one thing is certain, which is that the other two each see the same thing, that is a white plus his own colour, the subject's own, which he doesn't know.

So the subject says to himself, that if he himself is black, each of the two others will see a white and a black, and can say to himself – *If I am black, the white one would have already made for the door, and since he isn't moving, it's because I am myself white as well, and I'll go.*

Now, as our third subject sees neither of the others leave, he concludes from that that he is white, and makes for the door. That is how, on the basis of the immobility of the others, he himself grasps the fact that he is in a strictly equivalent position to the others, that is to say that he is white. Then it is only in a third moment [*temps*], in relation to a speculation on the reciprocity of the subjects, that he can come to feel that he is in the same position as the two others.

Nonetheless, do note that, as soon as he has reached this understanding, he must rush to the door. Indeed, once he has arrived at this understanding, he must realise that each of the others was able to reach the same result. So, if he gives them a headstart, no matter how small, he will fall back into his uncertainty of the moment [*temps*] before. That he isn't mistaken hangs on his very haste.

He has to say to himself – *If I don't hurry to arrive at this conclusion, I*

*automatically give in, not only to ambiguity, but to error, given my premises. If I let them get ahead of me, it will be proof that I am black.*

It is a sophism, as you are well aware, and the argument comes back again to the third moment [*temps*]. Everything hangs on something ungraspable. The subject holds in his hands the very articulation by which the truth he sifts out is inseparable from the very action which attests to it. If this action is delayed by one instant, by the same token he knows that he will be thrown into error.

Are you with me?

M. MARCHANT: *No one can move, or else all three of them.*

M. LAPLANCHE: *He may end in failure.*

We are now concerned with the subject in so far as he discourses about what he is doing. What he does is one thing, the way he discourses about it is another. If he discourses about it, he says – *If the act, whose necessity I have just discovered, is undertaken by the others before me, according to the very logic of my reasoning they are whites and I am black.*

M. MARCHANT: *But in the example, there is no before, that's the point.*

M. LAPLANCHE: *They leave because I am white, and . . .*

From the moment he lets the others get ahead of him, he has no way of getting himself out of it. He can reason in either of two ways, and he has no means of choosing between them. He is confronted with two terms, each having the properties of subjects, thinking like him. And for himself, the truth, from the point he has reached in his deduction, hangs on the haste with which he takes a step towards the door, after which he will have to explain why he thought as he did. The acceleration, the precipitation in the act, reveals itself in this instance to be coherent with the manifestation of the truth.

M. MARCHANT: *I don't agree because you are introducing the notions of being late and of hurrying.*

Precisely in order to show their logical value.

M. MARCHANT: *But these two notions can only be established in relation to something else. Now, here, there is no relation possible. That is why the three subjects cannot move. There is no relation, because each of the three reasons along the same lines, and awaits something . . .*

Suppose all three make a go of it.

M. MARCHANT: *Then all three get their heads chopped off.*

What will happen before they even get to the door?

M. MARCHANT: *That's not possible, they are all waiting.*

But the act of each depends on something not-happening, and not on something happening. And because each of the others doesn't make it happen, each of them can make it happen. So they will normally reach the same conclusion if they have the same time for understanding, a real element which lies at the heart of all psychological testing. We assume it to be equal.

M. MARCHANT: *But then one can't get oneself out of this. If one wants to resolve the problem, one has to say that the times for understanding aren't the same.*

But the problem is only interesting if you assume the times for understanding to be equal. If the times for understanding are unequal, not only is it an uninteresting problem, but you will see how complicated it gets.

M. MARCHANT: *Either they are not equally intelligent, or else they cannot move.*

M. LAPLANCHE: *If A doesn't see B leave, he will be deeply puzzled, but that isn't an error.*

It is an error, from the moment he reaches the truth.

M. MARCHANT: *He can't reach it.*

But if you assume the time for understanding to be fixed?

M. MARCHANT: *The same for all?*

Yes. At the end of this time for understanding, each of them will be convinced that he is white. All three will leave together, and in principle they will explain why they are white. If you want to reintroduce a point of infinitesimal hesitation, in which each would say to himself *but aren't the others leaving precisely because they have just realised that I am black*, what will happen? A halt. But you mustn't think the situation after the halt will be the same. When they start off, some progress will have been made. I'll skip over the details of the analysis – and leave it to you, you'll see how it is structured – but note that they might stop a second, but not a third time. In other words, in two scansions everything will have been said.

So, where is speech here? Where is language?

We have the language in the initial givens – there are two blacks, etc. These are essential givens of language, and they are entirely outside of reality. Speech is introduced from the moment when the subject acts in such a way as to assert, very simply – *I am white*. Of course, he doesn't assert it in a manner which is, as one says, logically grounded. But the step he takes is nonetheless valid if he has proceeded in the way I've just described to you – *If I don't say right away, as soon as I've understood it, that I'm white, I will never be able to affirm it validly again.*

I am not giving you this as a model of logical reasoning, but as a sophism,

designed to draw out the distinction between language applied to the imaginary – for the two other subjects are perfectly imaginary for the third, he imagines them, they are quite simply the reciprocal structure as such – and the symbolic moment of language, that is to say the moment of the affirmation. Here, you see, there's something which isn't completely identifiable with the temporal break you were talking about earlier on.

M. RIGUET: *I agree entirely.*

That is where the power revealed by the originality of the machines we have at our disposal falls short. There is a third dimension of time which they undeniably are not party to, which I'm trying to get you to picture via this element which is neither belatedness, nor being in advance, but haste, the relation to time peculiar to the human being, this relation to the chariot of time, which is there, close on our heels. That is where speech is to be found, and where language, which has all the time in the world, is not. That is why, furthermore, one gets nowhere with language.

DR LECLAIRE: *There is something which troubles me in all this. Earlier on you translated in the beginning was language, and that is the first time I've heard that. What are you referring to? Is this your translation?*

*In principio erat verbum*, that is undeniably language, it isn't speech.

DR LECLAIRE: *So there is no beginning.*

I didn't write the Gospel according to St John.

DR LECLAIRE: *That's the first time I've ever seen this. One always writes speech, or the word [verbe], and never language.*

I have already written the distich up twice on the blackboard and nobody has asked me for the explanation.

*Indem er alles schaft, was schafstet der Höchste? – Sich.  
Was schaft er aber vor er alles schafst? – Mich.*

What was the Almighty doing when he made the creation? – *Sich*, himself. And what was he before he made anything at all? *Mich*, myself. It is obviously a risky affirmation.

DR LECLAIRE: *I don't understand why you translate in the beginning, and not before the beginning.*

I'm not at all engaged in telling you that St John wrote things correctly. I am saying that, in St John, there's *in principio erat verbum*, in Latin. Now, as you saw when we translated the *De significatione*, *verbum* means word, the signifier, and not speech.

MISS X: *Verbum* is the translation for the Hebrew word *dabar* which does mean speech, and not language.

We will have to take another look at this bit of Hebrew. As long as the faculty of sciences hasn't been landed with a chair of theology, this will never get sorted out, neither for theology, nor for the sciences. But the question isn't at this point to know whether we should put the word or speech in the beginning. In the perspective we have taken on today and which I just illustrated by Daniel von Chepko's distich; there's a mirage whereby language, namely all your little 0s and 1s, is there from all eternity, independently of us. You may well ask me – *Where?* I would be really hard pressed finding an answer. But what is certain, as Mannoni was saying earlier on, is that within a certain perspective, we can only see them as being there since the beginning of time.

This is one of the ways in which Platonic and Freudian theory differ from one another. Plato's theory is a theory of reminiscence. Everything we understand, everything we recognise, must always have been there. And why? On occasion I've shown you how this theory is coherent with the fundamental myth of the dyad – Plato cannot conceive of the embodiment of ideas in any other way than in a series of endless reflections. Everything which happens and which is recognised is in the image of the idea. The image existing in itself is in its turn only an image of an idea existing in itself, is only an image in relation to another image. There is only reminiscence and, as we discussed at length yesterday evening, the *vagina dentata* will be only one image amongst others.<sup>3</sup>

But when we talk of the symbolic order, there are absolute beginnings, there is creation. That is why the *in principio erat verbum* is ambiguous. It's not for nothing that in Greek, it was called *logos*. At the beginning one may see it just as well in the perspective of this indefinite homogeneity which we rediscover every time in the domain of the imaginary.

All I need do is think about myself [*moi*] – I am eternal. From the moment I think about myself [*moi*], no destruction of me [*moi*] is possible. But when I say *I*, not only is destruction possible, but at every instant there is creation. Naturally, it isn't absolute, but for us, if a future is possible, it is because there is this possibility of creation. And if this future isn't, likewise, purely imaginary, it is because our *I* is carried forward by the entire discourse which came before. If Caesar, at the moment of crossing the Rubicon, isn't engaged in a ridiculous act, it is because he has behind him Caesar's entire past – adultery, the Mediterranean policy, the campaigns against Pompey – it is because of that that he can do something which has strictly symbolic value – for the Rubicon is no wider to cross than what's between my legs. This symbolic act unleashed a

<sup>3</sup> On 14 June 1955, Dr Robert Gessain gave a paper entitled ‘‘*Vagina dentata*’’ et *images fantasmatiques associées* (‘‘*Vagina dentata*’’ and associated fantasied images) to the Société Française de Psychanalyse. See *La Psychanalyse* 2, 1956, 316–18 for a resumé of this paper.

series of symbolic consequences. That is what accounts for the fact that there is a primacy of the future of the creation in the symbolic register, in so far as it is assumed by man.

Everything is a function of a past within which we must recognise the succession of prior creations. And even if we do not recognise it there, this past is there forever in the little 0s and the little 1s.

I wasn't trying to tell you that I believed that language was in the beginning – I know nothing of origins. But apropos of this ambiguous term, I wanted to question what for a while you were all agreed on, that the little 0s and the little 1s define a world with irrefutable laws, namely that the numbers are prime from the beginning.

Let us stop there; it is a bit rough-going today.

15 June 1955

## Psychoanalysis and cybernetics, or on the nature of language

### LECTURE<sup>1</sup>

Professor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In what I am going to say, I would like to single out from amongst you those who come regularly to hear me on Wednesdays, in order to associate them in the gratitude we feel for the person I named first, Jean Delay, who agreed to inaugurate this series of lectures, and who is honouring us by his presence at this session.

On a personal note, I would like to thank him for having given a home to the seminar which I have been running here for the last two years, giving us a roof which adds renown to this teaching through all the memories accumulated under it, and allowing it to share in the resonances of his own speech.

Today I would like to talk about psychoanalysis and cybernetics. As it involves bringing together psychoanalysis and the various human sciences, it seemed to me to be a subject worthy of attention.

<sup>1</sup> This was the last in a series of special lectures organised under the auspices of the Société Française de Psychanalyse, under the patronage of the Clinique de la Faculté de Médecine, around the theme 'Psychoanalysis and the human sciences'. Although some of these lectures have already been referred to, when Lacan or others made allusions to them in the course of the seminar, we thought it convenient to list the entire series, which ran parallel to the work of the seminar throughout the year.

- 10 November 1954 Jean Delay, *Neurosis and Creation*
- 16 November 1954 Alexandre Koyré, *Problems of the Platonic dialogue*
- 30 November 1954 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Kinship versus the family*
- 4 January 1955 Jean Hyppolite, *Psychoanalysis and phenomenology*
- 18 January 1955 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Philosophy and psychoanalysis*
- 8 February 1955 Étienne De Greef, *Homicide symbolism in Maeterlinck*
- 15 March 1955 Marcel Griaule, *Symbolisation of the world and the conditions of communication in the Sudanese*
- 19 April 1955 Medard Boss (Zurich), *Psychoanalysis and analysis of the Dasein*
- 10 May 1955 Émile Benveniste, *Psychoanalysis and linguistics*
- 24 May 1955 Daniel Lagache, *Psychoanalysis and psychology*
- 22 June 1955 Jacques Lacan, *Psychoanalysis and cybernetics, or on the nature of language*

I'll tell you right away, I won't be talking about those varieties of cybernetics which are more or less fashionable, nor will I be talking about the big or the little machines. I won't be calling them by their names, I won't be telling you about the wonders they accomplish. In what way could all that be of interest to us?

But nevertheless there is something that can, it seems to me, be got from these two roughly contemporaneous techniques, these two orders of thought and of science, psychoanalysis and cybernetics. Don't expect anything claiming to be exhaustive. Our concern will be to find an axis by means of which some light will be shed on a part of the signification of the one and of the other. This axis is none other than language. And I'm going to give you a quick glimpse of some aspects of the nature of language.

The question we will start off with came up in our seminar when, through a series of associations, we reached a point where we were asking ourselves what it would mean to play a game of chance with a machine.

The game of chance was the game of even and odd, and it may seem surprising that this is of interest in a seminar which deals with psychoanalysis. On occasion we have also talked about Newton. I don't think that these things come up by chance – if I may say so. It is precisely because we talk about the game of even and odd and also of Newton in this seminar that the technique of psychoanalysis has a chance of not falling into disrepair, not to say disrepute.

Well, in the course of this game of even and odd, we wanted to remind ourselves, us analysts, that nothing happens by chance, and also that something might come out of it which might pertain to chance at its purest.

The result was amazing. In this audience of analysts, we encountered genuine indignation at the thought that, as someone told me, I wanted to eliminate chance. In fact, the person who told me this was someone with staunch determinist convictions. And that is what was really frightening. This person was right – there is a close relation between the existence of chance and the basis of determinism.

Let us think about chance for a bit. What do we mean when we say that something happens *by chance*? We may mean one of two things, which may be very different – either that there is no intention, or that there is a law.

Now, the very idea of determinism is that law is without intention. That is indeed why the determinist theory always seeks to find out how something which is constituted in the real, and which functions according to a law, is engendered, starting off with something that is originally undifferentiated – chance as the absence of intention. To be sure, nothing happens without a cause, determinism tells us, but it is a cause without an intention.

This exemplary experiment might have suggested to my interlocutor – Lord knows how easily the mind slips about when it comes to such matters – that I was about to introduce determinism back into the game of heads or tails, with

which he was, more or less intuitively, identifying the game of even and odd. If even the game of heads or tails is determined, what will happen next? A genuine determinism will no longer be possible.

This question opens up that of discovering the nature of that determinism which we analysts take to be at the very root of our technique. We try to get the subject to make available to us, without any intention, *his thoughts*, as we say, his comments, his discourse, in other words that he should intentionally get as close as possible to chance. What is the determinism here sought after in an intention of chance? It is on this point that cybernetics can throw some light for us.

Cybernetics is a domain with very indeterminate frontiers. Finding its unity obliges us to cast our gaze over a variety of spheres of rationalisation, from politics, via the theory of games, to theories of communication, even to certain definitions of the notion of information.

Cybernetics, we are told, was born very straightforwardly from the work of engineers concerned with the economics of information passing through conductors, concerned with the way in which one can reduce down to its essential elements the mode in which a message is transmitted. In this guise, it would be about ten years old. It was given its name by Norbert Wiener, one of the most eminent of engineers. I think that that limits its importance, and we should cast further afield to find its birth.

To understand what cybernetics is about, one must look for its origin in the theme, so crucial for us, of the signification of chance. The past of cybernetics consists in nothing more than the rationalised formation of what we will call, to contrast them to the exact sciences, the conjectural sciences.

*Conjectural sciences*, this, I think, is the real name which should from now on be given to a specific group of sciences which are normally designated by the term *human sciences*. Not that I think that this is an improper term to use, since, in truth, human action is involved in any conjuncture. But I think it is too vague, too bound up with all kinds of confused echoes from pseudo-initiatory sciences which can only lower its tension and level. We can only gain by rendering our definition of the sciences of conjecture more rigorous and more specific.

If this is how we locate cybernetics, we will easily find it ancestors, Condorcet for instance, with his theory of votes and coalitions, of *parties*, as he says, and further back again Pascal, who would be its father, and its true point of origin.

I am going to start with the fundamental notions of the other sphere of sciences, the exact sciences, whose coming to fruition, in its modern form, doesn't go back very much further than that of the conjectural sciences. The former have in some way occulted, eclipsed, the latter, but they are inseparable from one another.

## 2

How are we to define the exact sciences? Should we say that, unlike the conjectural sciences, they are concerned with the real? But what is the real?

I don't think that in this respect the opinion of men has ever varied very much, contrary to what a psychologising genealogy of human thought would have us believe, according to which in early times man lived in dreams, and which claims that children are habitually hallucinated by their desires. A strange conception, so contrary to observation that it can only be described as a myth – a myth whose origin one should inquire into.

The meaning which man has always given to the real is the following – it is something one always finds in the same place, whether or not one has been there. This real may have moved, but if it has moved, one looks for it elsewhere, one looks for why it has been disturbed, one also tells oneself that sometimes it moves under its own steam. But it is always well and truly in its place, whether or not we are there. And our own displacements have, in principle, with certain exceptions, no efficacious influence on this change of place.

To be sure, the exact sciences are very closely tied to this function of the real. Does that mean that, prior to their development, this function was lacking in man: that he was persuaded by this alleged omnipotence of thought which is identified with the so-called archaic stage of animism? It isn't at all the case that man formerly lived at the heart of an anthropomorphic world from which he expected human responses. I think that this conception is totally puerile, and the notion of the infancy of humanity corresponds to nothing historical. Prior to the exact sciences, man thought, as we do, that the real is what keeps turning up where one expected it. At the same time of night one will always find one particular star on a particular meridian, it will turn up again there, it is indeed always there, it is always the same. It's not for nothing that I take the celestial landmark before the terrestrial, for in fact the map of the sky was drawn up before the map of the globe.

Man thought that there were places which endured, but he also thought that his action was concerned with the preservation of this order. For a long time man had the idea that his rites, his ceremonies – the emperor opening the furrow of spring, the dances of spring, guaranteeing the fertility of nature – his ordered and significant actions – action in the real sense, that of speech – were indispensable to sustaining things in their place. He didn't think that the real would vanish if he didn't participate in this ordered manner, but he thought that the real would be disturbed. He did not pretend to lay down the law, he pretended to be indispensable to the permanence of the law. An important definition, for in truth it entirely safeguards the rigour of the existence of the real.

The limit was crossed when man realised that his rites, his dances and his invocations didn't really have anything to do with the order of things. Was he right or wrong? We haven't the faintest idea. But what is certain is that we no longer have the old conviction. From that point on, the perspective of the exact sciences was born.

From the moment man thinks that the great clock of nature turns all by itself, and continues to mark the hour even when he isn't there, the order of science is born. The order of science hangs on the following, that in officiating over nature, man has become its officious servant. He will not rule over it, except by obeying it. And like the slave, he tries to make the master dependent on him by serving him well.

He knows that nature could be on time for the rendezvous he might give it. But what is this exactitude? It is precisely the encounter of two times [*temps*] in nature.

There is a very great clock, which is none other than the solar system, a natural clock which had to be deciphered, and there's no doubt that this was one of the most decisive steps in the constitution of exact science. But man must also have his clock, his watch. Who is on time [*exact*]?<sup>2</sup> Is it nature? Is it man?

It isn't clear that nature makes every rendezvous. Of course, one can define what is natural as what shows up on time for the rendezvous. When M. de Voltaire said of Buffon's natural history that it wasn't as natural as all that, he was trying to say something of this sort. This is a question of definition – *My loved one always makes the rendezvous, because when she doesn't come, I no longer call her my loved one*. Is it man who is on time? What is the source of being on time [*exactitude*], if not precisely in the synchronisation of watches?

Do note that the watch, the reliable watch, has only existed since Huyghens succeeded in making the first perfectly isochronic clock, in 1659, thus inaugurating the *universe of precision* – to use Alexandre Koyré's expression – without which no truly exact science would be possible. In what does being on time [*exactitude*] reside? It consists in something which we cause to fall in this clock, in this watch, namely a factor borrowed from natural time – the *g* factor. You know that, it's the acceleration caused by gravity, in sum, then, a space time relation. It developed out of a certain *thought experiment*, to use Galileo's term, which is a hypothesis embodied in an instrument. And if the instrument is constructed to confirm the hypothesis, there is no need whatever to do the experiment which confirms it, since the very fact that it works confirms the hypothesis.

But one still has to calibrate this instrument with a unit of time. And a unit of time is always borrowed from, it always refers to, the real, that is, to the fact that

<sup>2</sup> There are a series of puns in this passage and those that follow between 'being on time' (*exact*) and 'the exact sciences'.

it always turns up again in the same place. The unit of time is our sidereal day. If you ask a physicist – for instance let us take M. Borel – he will maintain that, if an imperceptible but not, in the long run, unappreciable slowing down of the rotation of the earth occurred, given that this rotation governs our sidereal day, we would be absolutely incapable, under the present circumstances, of finding evidence of it, given that we regulate our time as a function of this sidereal day, which we cannot control.

I say this to give you a sense of the fact that if one measures space with something solid, one measures time with time – which isn't the same thing.

There's nothing surprising, under these conditions, if a certain part of our exact science comes to be summed up in a very small number of symbols. That is where our requirement that everything be expressed in terms of matter and motion comes from, I mean in terms of matter and time, since, in so far as motion is something in the real, we have in fact succeeded in eliminating it, in reducing it.

The little symbolic game in which Newton's system and that of Einstein is summed up has in the end very little to do with the real. The science which reduces the real to several little letters, to a little bundle of formulae, will probably seem, with the hindsight of later epochs, like an amazing epic, and will also dwindle down, like an epic, to a rather short circuit.

Having considered the foundation of the exactitude of the exact sciences, namely the instrument, we might well go on to ask something else, namely – what are these places? In other words, let us concern ourselves with these places as empty.

It is in fact because this question was raised, contemporaneously with the birth of the exact sciences, that this calculus, which has been ill rather than well understood, began to emerge – the probability calculus, which appears in a truly scientific form for the first time in 1654, with Pascal's treatise on the arithmetic triangle, and emerging in the form of a calculation, not of randomness, but of chances, of the encounter in itself.

What Pascal develops with the arithmetic triangle, the first machine, has a claim on the attention of the scientific world, in that it enables one to determine immediately what a gambler has a right to expect at any given moment when the succession of turns which make up a game is interrupted. A succession of turns is the simplest form one can give to the idea of the encounter. As long as one hasn't come to the end of the sequence of turns fixed by convention, something can be evaluated, that is, the possibilities of the encounter as such. What's at issue is the place, and what does or doesn't come to fill it, something then which is strictly equivalent to its own inexistence. The science of what is found at the same place is substituted for by the science of the combination of places as such. It arises in an ordered register which assuredly assumes the notion of the turn, that is, the notion of scansion.

Everything which up until then had been the science of numbers becomes a combinatory science. The more or less confused, accidental traversal of the world of symbols is organised around the correlation of absence and presence. And the search for the laws of presence and absence will tend towards the establishing of the binary order which leads to what we call cybernetics.

And in keeping on this frontier the originality of what appears in our world in the form of cybernetics, I am tying it to man's waiting. If the science of the combinations of the scanned encounter has come to the attention of man, it is because it deeply concerns him. And it is not for nothing that it comes out of games of chance. And it is not for nothing that game theory is concerned with all the functions of our economic life, the theory of coalitions, of monopolies, the theory of war. Yes, war itself, considered in its aspect as game, detached from anything which might be real. It is not for nothing that the same word designates such diverse fields as well as the game of chance. Now, in the first games I mentioned, what is involved is a relation of intersubjective coordination. Does man make a call on something, does he look for something in the game of chance – and also in the calculation he consecrates to it – whose semantic homophony shows that it must have some relation with intersubjectivity, even though in the game of chance it seems to have been eliminated? Here we come very close to the central question with which I began, namely – what is the chance of the unconscious, which in some way lies behind man?

In the game of chance no doubt he will test his luck [*chance*], but also he is going to read his destiny in it. He has the idea that something is revealed there, which belongs to him, and, I would say, all the more so given that there is no one confronting him.

I've told you how the entire movement of the theory converges on a binary symbol, on the fact that anything can be written in terms of 0 and 1. What else is needed before what we call cybernetics can appear in the world?

It has to function in the real, independently of any subjectivity. This science of empty places, of encounters in and of themselves has to be combined, has to be totalised and has to start functioning all by itself.

What is required for that? To support this, something must be taken from the real. From the beginning, man has tried to join the real in the play of symbols. He has written things on the wall, he has even imagined that things like *Mene*, *Mene*, *Tekel*, *Upharsin*, get written all by themselves on walls, he has placed figures at the spot where, at each hour of the day, the shadow of the sun comes to rest. But in the end, the symbols always stayed where they were intended to be placed. Stuck in this real, one might think that they were just its landmark.

What's new is having permitted them to fly with their own wings. And this has come about thanks to a simple, commonplace apparatus, which anyone can use, an apparatus where all you need do is turn the handle – a door.

## 3

Please give this a thought – a door isn't entirely real. To take it for such would result in strange misunderstandings. If you observe a door, and you deduce from that that it produces draughts, you'd take it under your arm to the desert to cool you down.

I have spent a considerable amount of time looking in all the dictionaries for the meaning of a door. There are two pages in Littré on the door – ranging from door as opening to door as more or less hinged means of closure, from the Sublime Porte to the door with which one makes a mask on the nose – *if you come back, I'll mask your face with it*, as Regnard writes.<sup>3</sup> After this, without further comment, Littré writes that a door must either be open or shut. That didn't entirely satisfy me, despite its literary echoes, because I am naturally suspicious when it comes to the wisdom of nations – there are a lot of things written into it, but in a form which is a little confessional, and that is indeed why psychoanalysis exists. A door must, it is true, be either open or shut. But they aren't equivalent.

Language can help us here. A door, my God, opens on to fields, but we don't say that it closes on to the sheepfold, nor on to the paddock. I'm aware that here I am confusing *porta* and *fores*, which is the door of the paddock, but one more confusion won't make much difference at this point, so we'll pursue our meditation on the door.

One might think, because I've spoken of the field and the sheepfold, that what is at issue is the inside and the outside. I think this would be a serious mistake – we live in a sufficiently grand age to imagine a great wall which would go exactly round the earth, and if you knock a door through it, which is the inside, which is the outside?

You don't think a door is any the more generous for being open. We say that a window gives on to open country. It is rather bizarre that, when we say that a door gives on to somewhere, it is generally a door which is for the most part closed and sometimes even blocked up . . .

One takes to the door sometimes, and it is always a pretty decisive act. And more often than not, a door is denied you.

There may be two people watching either side of a door, but try to imagine that happening with a window. You can break down a door – even when it is open. Naturally, as Alphonse Allais used to say, that is dumb and cruel. On the contrary, going in by the window is always viewed as a free and easy act, and always intentional, whereas one often goes through a door without noticing it. Thus, to a first approximation, the door doesn't have the same instrumental function as the window.

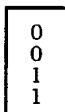
<sup>3</sup> 'Si vous revenez, je vous en fais un masque sur le nez.'

In its nature, the door belongs to the symbolic order, and it opens up either on to the real, or the imaginary, we don't know quite which, but it is either one or the other. There is an asymmetry between the opening and the closing – if the opening of the door controls access, when closed, it closes the circuit. The door is a real symbol, the symbol *par excellence*, that symbol in which man's passing, through the cross it sketches, intersecting access and closure, can always be recognised.

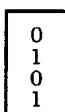
Once it has become possible to fold the two characteristics together, to construct an enclosure, that is to say a circuit, so that something passes when it is closed, and doesn't when it is open, that is when the science of the conjuncture passes into the realm of realisation of cybernetics. If there are machines which calculate all by themselves, add, do sums, do all the marvellous things which man had until then thought to be peculiar to his thinking, it is because the fairy electricity, as we say, enables us to establish circuits, circuits which open and close, which interrupt themselves or restore themselves, as a function of the existence of cybernetised doors.

Note that what's important about this is the relation as such, of access and closure. Once the door is open, it closes. When it is closed, it opens. A door isn't either open or shut, it must be either open and then shut, and then opened and then shut. Thanks to the electrical circuit, and to the induction circuit connected on to it, that is to say what is called feedback,<sup>4</sup> it's sufficient for the door to close for it to be returned by an electro-magnet to an open state and that is its closure again, and its opening again. In this way what is called an oscillation is produced. This oscillation is the scansion. And the scansion is the basis upon which one can inscribe indefinitely the ordered action through employing a series of montages which will be nothing more than child's play.

Here are four cases for a door – in the first two, a closed door, in the others, an open door.



For another door, we can have alternatively an open or a closed door.



<sup>4</sup> English in the original.

As the fancy might take you, you now decide, for instance, that a third door will be open or closed under certain circumstances, depending on the position of the two preceding doors.

0	0	:	0
0	1	:	1
1	0	:	1
1	1	:	1

– Formula 1 –

For the third door to be open, all that's needed is that at least one of the preceding ones be open.

There are other formulae. You can decide that the two doors have to be open for the third one to be open.

0	0	:	0
0	1	:	0
1	0	:	0
1	1	:	1

– Formula 2 –

The third formula has considerable interest:

0	0	:	0
0	1	:	1
1	0	:	1
1	1	:	0

– Formula 3 –

Here, you decide that the third door will only be open when only one of the two doors is.

What does all this amount to? Anything one wishes. Formula 1 can be called, from a logical perspective, reunion or conjunction. Formula 2 also has a logical reading and since its law merges with that of arithmetic multiplication, it is sometimes called logical multiplication. Finally, formula 3 is addition modulus 2. When you add 1 and 1, in a world of binary notation, you get 0 and you carry 1.

Once we have the possibility of embodying this 0, this 1, the notation of presence and absence, in the real, embodying it in a rhythm, a fundamental

scansion, something moves into the real, and we are left asking ourselves – perhaps not for very long, but after all some substantial minds are doing so – whether we have a machine that thinks.

We are very well aware that this machine doesn't think. We made the machine, and it thinks what it has been told to think. But if the machine doesn't think, it is obvious that we don't think either when we are performing an operation. We follow the very same procedures as the machine.

The important thing here is to realise that the chain of possible combinations of the encounter can be studied as such, as an order which subsists in its rigour, independently of all subjectivity.

Through cybernetics, the symbol is embodied in an apparatus – with which it is not to be confused, the apparatus being just its support. And it is embodied in it in a literally trans-subjective way.

I've had to proceed by paths which may seem to you to have been long-winded. But you have to have them in your minds in order to understand the true meaning of the contribution of cybernetics, and in particular the notion of the message.

## 4

In cybernetics, the notion of the message has nothing in common with what we usually call a message, which always has a meaning. The cybernetic message is a sequence of signs. And a sequence of signs always comes down to a series of 0s and 1s. That is indeed why what is called the unit of information, that is to say what the efficacy of any kind of sign is measured against, always refers back to a primary unit called the keyboard, which is nothing other than the alternative, quite simply.

Within this system of symbols, the message is caught in a banal network, that of the combination of the encounter on the basis of a unified scansion, that is to say of a 1 which is the scansion itself.

On the other hand, the notion of information is as simple to grasp as one of these little tables I've been drawing for you.

0	0	:	0
0	1	:	0
1	0	:	0
1	1	:	1

Let us start with this table, which should read as follows – I must have two positive plays to win. This means that at the beginning, I have an expectation of 1/4. Suppose that I have already had one go. If it was negative, I haven't got

another chance. If it was positive, I have one chance in two,  $1/2$ . This means that a differentiation of level has come about with respect to my chances, in the form of an increase.

The phenomena of energy and of nature always tend in the direction of an equalisation of levels of difference. In the order of the message and of the calculation of chances, to the extent that the information increases, the difference in levels becomes more differentiated. I am not saying it always increases, for you may find cases in which it doesn't, but it doesn't necessarily diminish, and always tends towards differentiation.

Everything we call language can be organised around this basic element. In order for language to come into being, insignificant little things such as spelling and syntax have to be introduced. But all that is a given from the start, because these tables constitute a syntax, and that is indeed why one can get machines to undertake logical operations.

In other words, within this perspective, syntax exists before semantics. Cybernetics is a science of syntax, and it is in a good position to help us perceive that the exact sciences do nothing other than tie the real to a syntax.

So what is semantics, that is to say concrete languages, those we deal with, with their ambiguities, their emotional content, their human meaning? Are we going to say that semantics is peopled, furnished with the desire of men?

What is certain is that it is us who introduce meaning. In any case it is certain for a great number of things. But can we say that everything circulating in the machine has no meaning whatsoever? Certainly not in all the senses of the word *meaning*, because, for the message to be a message, not only must there be a sequence of signs, but there has to be a sequence of directed signs. For it to function in accordance with a syntax, the machine must run in a certain direction. And when I say *machine*, you can sense that it isn't simply a little box – when I am writing on paper, when I go through the transformations of the little 1s and 0s, that also is always a directed activity.

It is therefore not entirely rigorous to say that it is human desire which, all by itself, introduces meaning into this primitive language. The proof of that is that nothing unexpected comes out of the machine. That is to say, not so much what interests us, but what we predicted. It stops just where we have determined that it would stop, and that's where a certain result can be read.

The foundation of the system is already in play. How could it be established if it didn't rest on the notion of chance, that is to say on a certain pure anticipation, which already has a meaning?

So this is the symbol in its most purified form. The latter can already by itself yield more than mistakes in syntax. Mistakes in syntax engender only errors, they are only accidents. But mistakes in programming engender falsehood. Already, at this level, the true and the false are at stake. What does that signify for us analysts? What are we faced with when the human subject addresses himself to us?

His discourse is an impure discourse. *Impure* – is it so just because of mistakes in syntax? No, of course not. The whole of psychoanalysis is quite rightly founded on the fact that getting something meaningful out of human discourse isn't a matter of logic. We look behind this discourse, which has its own meaning, for its meaning, in another meaning, and precisely in the symbolic function which is manifested through it. And also there now emerges another meaning of the word *symbol*.

At this point we come upon a precious fact revealed to us by cybernetics – there is something in the symbolic function of human discourse that cannot be eliminated, and that is the role played in it by the imaginary.

The first symbols, natural symbols, stem from a certain number of prevailing images – the image of the human body, the image of a certain number of obvious objects like the sun, the moon, and some others. And that is what gives human language its weight, its resources, and its emotional vibration. Is this imaginary homogeneous with the symbolic? No. And it would be a perversion of the meaning of psychoanalysis to reduce it to an emphasis on these imaginary themes, to the coaptation of the subject by an elective, privileged, prevailing object, which gives the modulus of what is called, in what has now become a fashionable term, the object relation.

The one thing which cybernetics clearly highlights is the radical difference between the symbolic and the imaginary orders. A cybernetician recently admitted to me the extreme difficulty one has, whatever is said about it, in translating cybernetically the functions of *Gestalt*, that is the coaptation of good forms. And what is good form in living nature is bad form in the symbolic.

As has often been said, man invented the wheel. The wheel isn't to be found in nature, but it is a good form, that of the circle. On the other hand, in nature you won't find a wheel which describes the trace of one of its points on each of its circuits. There is no cycloid in the imaginary. The cycloid is a discovery in the symbolic. And whereas the latter can easily be produced by a cybernetic machine, one encounters unprecedented difficulties, except in the most artificial manner, in getting one circle to correspond to another by means of a dialogue between two machines.

That is what highlights the essential distinction between the two planes – that of the imaginary and that of the symbolic.

There is an inertia in the imaginary which we find making itself felt in the discourse of the subject, sowing discord in the discourse, making it such that I do not realise that when I mean someone well, I mean him ill, that when I love him, it is myself that I love, or when I think I love myself, it is precisely at this moment that I love an other. It is precisely the exercise of the dialectic of analysis which should dissipate this imaginary confusion, and restore to the discourse its meaning as discourse.

The issue is to know whether the symbolic exists as such, or whether the

symbolic is simply the fantasy of the second degree of the imaginary coaptations. This is where there is a choice between two orientations of analysis.

Given that, through the vicissitudes of history, all meanings have for a long time been accumulating as semantic ballast, is it a matter of following the subject in the direction which he has given, in the here and now, to his discourse, in that he knows that he is engaged in psychoanalysis, and that psychoanalysis has formulated certain norms? Is it a matter of encouraging him to be a good person, to become someone of substance who has attained instinctual maturity, leaving behind the stages in which the image of this or that orifice dominates? Is it a matter, in analysis, of a coaptation of these fundamental images, of a rectification, of a normalisation in terms of the imaginary, or of a liberation of meaning in the discourse, in this continuation of the universal discourse in which the subject is engaged? That is where the schools diverge.

Freud had this sense of meaning in the highest degree, which accounts for the fact that so many of his works, *The Three Caskets* for instance, read as if they were written by a divine, as if they were guided by a meaning belonging to the order of poetical inspiration. What's at issue is knowing whether or not, yes or no, analysis will continue in the Freudian direction, searching not for the ineffable, but for meaning.

What is the meaning of meaning? Meaning is the fact that the human being isn't master of this primordial, primitive language. He has been thrown into it, committed, caught up in its gears.

We don't know the origin. We are told, for instance, that the cardinal numbers appeared in languages before the ordinal numbers. That hadn't been expected. One might have thought that man comes upon number by way of the ordinal, through dancing, through civil and religious procession, the order of precedence, the organisation of the city, which is nothing more than order and hierarchy. And yet the cardinal number came first, the linguists tell me.

We must marvel at the paradox. Here man isn't master in his own house. There is something into which he integrates himself, which through its combinations already governs. The passage of man from the order of nature to the order of culture follows the same mathematical combinations which will be used to classify and explain. Claude Lévi-Strauss calls them the elementary structures of kinship. And yet primitive men are not supposed to have been Pascals. Man is engaged with all his being in the procession of numbers, in a primitive symbolism which is distinct from imaginary representations. It is in the middle of that that something of man has to gain recognition. But what has to be recognised, Freud teaches us, is not expressed, but repressed.

With a machine, whatever doesn't come on time simply falls by the wayside and makes no claims on anything. This is not true for man, the scansion is alive,

and whatever doesn't come on time remains in suspense. That is what is involved in repression.

No doubt something which isn't expressed doesn't exist. But the repressed is always there, insisting, and demanding to be. The fundamental relation of man to this symbolic order is very precisely what founds the symbolic order itself – the relation of non-being to being.

What insists on being satisfied can only be satisfied in recognition. The end of the symbolic process is that non-being come to be, because it has spoken.

*22 June 1955*

# XXIV

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## *A, m, a, S*

VERBUM AND DABAR  
THE MACHINE AND INTUITION  
SCHEMA OF THE CURE  
THE LIBIDINAL AND THE SYMBOLIC

In the course of our penultimate meeting, the question I put to you had mixed responses, and that session has had a variety of impacts on the minds of those who participated in it. For me it was a way of tuning my instrument for what I had to tell you in my paper on psychoanalysis and cybernetics. I hope you also found it useful.

### 1

Although I didn't pause to consider it at the time, because the way things were going, it would have given you even more of a feeling of aberration, I did take in your remark about Hebrew. So, what were you trying to tell me, when you said to me that the *verbum* of the first verse of St John was the Hebrew *dabar*? What grounds do you have for that?

It isn't a trap. I thought about it again, an hour ago, and I am no better up on this than you are, almost certainly less so.

M. X: *Well, first of all, I would say that there is an a priori fact which leads us to think that.*

If it really is certain that St John wrote in Greek, that doesn't necessarily entail that he thought in Greek, and that his *logos* was the Babylonian *logos* for instance. You say he was thinking of the Hebrew *dabar*. Can you tell me why? Because it isn't the only way to render what *dabar* means in Hebrew.

M. X: *To give a summary of the question, I would say that one doesn't find one truly Platonic concept in St John. It is a fact, and I could prove it to you. What is interesting, is that in general logos . . .*

Who is saying anything about Platonic concepts? I paused over this *verbum* so as to bring it closer on this occasion to the Latin use, which is sufficiently signposted by the use Saint Augustine makes of it in *De Significatione*, which we

discussed last year. You should have a clearer sense of all its implications after my last lecture. I put it to you that the *verbum* was perhaps prior to any speech, and even to the *fiat* of Genesis, as a kind of prior axiomatic. And at that point you objected that it is the Hebrew *dabar*.

M. X: *Because you said* – in the beginning was language. Upon which Leclaire said – not language, but speech. *And I agreed.*

There are two questions. First, why does *dabar* underlie the *logos* of St John? And then, does *dabar* mean speech rather than anything else? Deal with these two questions. So, why *dabar*?

M. X: *For two reasons. The first is that it is quite clearly an implicit reference to the beginning of Genesis.*

At the beginning of Genesis, we find, verse 3 – *fiat lux*, precisely *va'omer*. It isn't at all *dabar*, *va'omer*. In fact it is exactly the opposite.

M. X: *No! it isn't exactly the opposite!*

Tell me why.

M. X: *There is a Rabbinical tradition which has nominalised this third verse of Genesis, into something like a mediating entity between the Creator and the creation, and this would be speech, as there is wisdom. But what is certain is that the entire Biblical tradition contains no concept of ratio, of logos in the Greek sense. That is what Bultmann has shown through very deep analysis. The concept of the universe doesn't exist in the Biblical tradition. It is completely lacking in the concept of a fixed, determinate law whereby everything is linked together, which is what the Greek concept of logos means, the rationality of the world, the world considered as a whole in which everything happens in a linked, logical manner. The Hebrews always talk of a totality of things, or the sky and the earth and all that. But they do not think in static, essentialist concepts.*

Having heard my lecture, do you think that, when I speak of a radical symbolic order, I have in mind this game of places, this initial conjecture, this original conjectural game, prior to the advent of determinism, prior to any rationalised notion of the universe? If I may put it this way, that's the rational prior to its conjunction with the real. Do you think that is what I have in mind? Is it the four causalities, the principle of sufficient reason, the whole caboodle?

M. X: *But if you say in the beginning was language, it is like a retrospective projection of present-day rationality.*

It is not for me to say it. I'm not saying it, St John is.

M. X: *No, he doesn't say that.*

Come on, Father Beirnaert, because we are in the middle of trying to demonstrate the philological expertise of X. That the Semites never had the notion of a universe as closed as the O, whose system Aristotle gives us, is one thing.

M. X: *It is essentially in motion and without rational law. What happens in nature is the resonances of God's speech. It is a universe which isn't determined, isn't rational, historical if you want, where everything happens through personal initiatives.*

Yes, but that doesn't mean that it isn't rational, since it is speech which modulates it.

M. X: *I would say – not essentialist.*

And you, Father Beirnaert?

FATHER BEIRNAERT: *I've been through the Holy Scriptures, like everyone else.*

Do you know what a certain Burnett did?

M. X: Yes.

He studied the first verse of St John with great care. I wasn't able to find his text since you raised this objection, but I can more or less remember the conclusion. He says that behind the *logos* of St John, what is assumed is the Aramaic *memmra*.

M. X: *That is the same thing as dabar in Hebrew. It is dabar which has been rendered substantial, rabbinical, as I told you.*

That's not the point.

M. X: *That is to say that several things have led to this first verse. You have the tradition of Genesis, then the current of Rabbinical thought.*

In any case, *memmra* is far closer to *va'omer* from the first verse of Genesis, it is the first root. I looked up *dabar* an hour ago in the *Genesius*. It is an embodied imperative, of the style, *duxit, locutus est*, and even includes the translation of *insidiatus est*, to engage, to seduce. Its precise implication is everything which is warped, vitiated, corrupted, in connection with speech, when it descends to the archi-temporal. In any case, *dabar* is always whatever is alluring, deceiving, speech at its most self-invalidating in relation to *ammara*.

M. X: *No, not always. For instance, thunder is the speech of God, and not in the self-invalidating sense. What you're talking of is a secondary meaning, but it isn't the primary meaning.*

But it shows the point to which the movement of derivation of the meaning tends.

M. X: *It can derive, obviously it can derive.*

It is clearly attested.

M. X: *Of course, but that doesn't prove anything.*

But in any case it shows that nothing allows us to identify this *dabar* with the albeit problematic usage, let us say, since one does get quite attached to it, of *logos* in the Greek text of St John.

M. X: *In any case, one thing is certain, the Platonic sense of logos must be excluded, for it is totally absent everywhere else.*

But that isn't what I had in mind.

M. X: *In any case it must not be translated by language.*

As far as the *logos* in question is concerned, one mustn't neglect the inflection that the Latin *verbum* yields. We can turn it into something completely different from the reason for things, namely this play of absence and presence which already provides the frame for *fait*. For, in the end, *fait* is made on a backdrop of the un-made which is prior to it.<sup>1</sup> In other words, I think that it isn't inconceivable that even the *fait*, the most primary of creative speeches, is secondary.

M. X: *Yes. But I would say that one is there placed at the beginning of the temporal historic order, and one doesn't go beyond, as you are insinuating.*

Saying, when it's a matter of speech, *in principle, in principio*, has a mirage aspect to it.

M. X: *I'm not sure I follow you now.*

Once things are structured in a certain imaginary intuition, they seem to have been there from the beginning, but that is a mirage, of course. Your objection is to say that there is a retro-action of this constituted world, in a model or archetype which would constitute it. But it isn't necessarily the archetype. I absolutely exclude from what I am teaching you the retro-action in an archetype which would amount to a condensation. It's not the Platonic *logos*, the eternal forms.

M. X: *For my part, I've always understood language in contrast to speech, like this condensation, this essence of all that there is.*

I was trying to get you to understand another meaning of the word *language*.

M. X: *Ah!*

<sup>1</sup> In French, '*fait*' and '*non-fait*'.

What's at issue is a succession of absences and presences, or rather of presence on a background of absence, of absence constituted by the fact that a presence can exist. There is no absence in the real. There is only absence if you suggest that there may be a presence there when there isn't one. In the *in principio*, I am proposing to locate the word in so far as it creates the opposition, the contrast. It is the original contradiction of 0 and 1.

M. X: *Then, in what way is it opposed to speech?*

It gives it its radical condition.

M. X: *Yes, but to my way of thinking, you can designate this condition as satisfactorily by speech as by language, because it is so far beyond this opposition.*

That is true. But that's what I want to point out to you. It is this kind of master word, if I may call it so, which is at issue, and not the register of *dabar*, which is in some sense the legalist orientation.

M. X: *Oh!*

You can check *Genesius* again when you get home.

M. X: *But I have studied all these texts. There is a long article by Guideau which collects all the possible texts together, and he doesn't take it in this direction. I find him more sophisticated than Genesius, which points in the direction of what you are saying – insidious.*

The fact that *dabar* can include *insidiatus est* shows the extent to which it can be inflected.

M. X: *It may inflect, yes, the way speech can become chatter.*

FATHER BEIRNAERT: *It is the same with the word parole in French – Il parle [he talks], that is, he does nothing.*

That's not quite right, because *dabar* doesn't include the sense of emptiness.

M. X: *There's a text, Isaiah, fifty-five – God's speech comes down to earth, and returns as if fertilised. It is creative speech, not insidious speech, and it corresponds to the Aramaic *memmra*, in part rendered a little substantial, it is speech imbued with life.*

You think that is the meaning of the Aramaic *memmra*? You think that this speech makes any compromise with life? Here we're on the level of the death instinct.

M. X: *That comes from the tendency to try to understand what is there as an intermediary between the person who is speaking and what he produces. It must have a certain consistency, and that is the beginning, if you like, of a speculative tendency in Hebraic thought.*

What, *dabar*?

M. X: Memmra.

You think so?

M. X: Yes, that's the Rabbinical tradition.

FATHER BEIRNAERT: When does memmra appear?

M. X: It must date from the third century.

In the article by Burnett that I mentioned, he shows, by all kinds of cross-checkings, that St John thought in Aramaic.

M. X and FATHER BEIRNAERT: That is certain.

What you call the Rabbinical tradition is its gnostic inflection.

M. X: Yes, it obviously allows gnostic thought to gain a hold, but it isn't gnostic in itself. It is essentially legalist thought, seeking to codify everything.

You don't think *dabar* is closer to that?

M. X: No, memmra.

## 2

I am not engaging you in an *ex cathedra* teaching. I don't think it would befit our object, language and speech, for me to bring something apodictic for you here, something you would just have to record and put in your pocket. Of course, as things go on, there is more and more language in our pockets, and it even overflows into our brains, which doesn't make that much difference there – you can always put your handkerchief over it.

If there is a true speech behind this discourse, it is yours, my listeners, as much, if not more, than mine.

Last time I asked you to put questions to me. And as they proved to be a bit lightweight, I suggested a theme to you – what do you make of what I am trying to get at vis-à-vis language and speech? On this topic, some valuable objections were in fact formulated and the fact that they were halted in the course of explication, and that they even sometimes generated a certain confusion, wasn't in the least discouraging. It simply means that analysis is in progress.

As the lecture I gave might seem to be the dialectical culmination of everything which has been triggered by this year's work, I ask you again today, if you have any questions to put to me. Today I ask you once again to risk yourselves in the unknown, in this zone of ignorance, which we must never forget in the analytic experience, for it is the position we automatically adopt.

Some say that, as far as analytic theory is concerned, it is I who build, who

put my construction to you, and you, you go off with it. I don't want any of that. Vis-à-vis this archetypal, Platonic order, about which you know I have such reservations, vis-à-vis this original speech which is there to give us the emergence of the symbolic, we are in the position of having to *conceive*, in the full sense of the word.

We do not think for one moment that everything has already been written. As M. Lefèvre-Pontalis pointed out the other day, there wouldn't be anything at all if a speaking subject didn't exist. And that is why, for something new to come into existence, ignorance must exist. That is the position we are in, and that is why we must conceive, in the full sense. When we know something, we are already not conceiving anything any longer.

Who will take the floor? M. Marchant, who looks as if the spirit has descended upon him?

**M. MARCHANT:** *The spirit which has descended on me at this moment would rather make me protest. What is the point of our asking questions?*

There may have been some turn in my discourse, in my last lecture, which may have seemed too abrupt, too elusive, abridged, forgotten for you, and which stops you seeing the connection.

**M. MARCHANT:** *I'm pitching my question at a far higher level, if I may say so. We have been listening here, for a number of months, to a seminar from which we have each drawn what we could. If we ask questions, we'll always have a tendency to bring all this down to things on a more solid level, if one may say so, with all the ill effects that implies.*

We do these things to end up with practice, and don't forget that the latter is entirely conceptualised.

**M. VALABREGA:** *I have a question about your paper. You spoke of triangularity, which may or may not be recognised by the cybernetic machine. Does this notion then belong to the imaginary or to the symbolic order? Since you spoke of ignorance just now, I thought of Nicholas da Cusa, who, throughout the whole of the first part of the De Docta Ignorantia engages in a formal analysis of the notion of triangularity, and ties it, it seems to me, to the symbol.*

You are alluding to what I said about the special difficulties one encounters in formalising, in the symbolic sense of the word, certain *Gestalten*. And I didn't take the triangle as my example, but the circle, and that's not the same thing.

**M. VALABREGA:** *In what I said, I alluded to the fact that the cybernetic machine may or may not recognise a form, depending on its position in space. I then got confused, and so did others – we no longer knew whether, for you, the circularity or triangularity pertains to the symbolic or the imaginary order in these experiments.*

Everything intuitive is far closer to the imaginary than to the symbolic. It is very much a present-day concern of mathematical thought to eliminate the intuitive elements as thoroughly as possible. The intuitive element is considered to be an impurity in the development of the mathematical symbolic. This isn't to say, however, that mathematicians consider the issue settled. Some think intuition cannot be eliminated. Nevertheless, there remains the aspiration to reduce everything to an axiomatic.

When it comes to the machine, I think that it cannot, of course, settle the question. But note what happens each time we try to put the machine in a position to recognise good form, despite all the aberrations of perspective. *Gestalt* theory says that, for us, it is the simplest thing to recognise good form in intuition, in the imagination. With the machine, we never produce an effect founded on a simplicity of the same order – it is always through the most complex, the most artificial compositions, by a point-by-point sweeping of space, a scanning,<sup>2</sup> and by means of formulae which are in consequence very complicated, that one recomposes what one could call the sensitivity of the machine to a particular form. In other words, good forms do not constitute the simplest formulae for the machine. Which is already a sufficient indication in experience of the opposition between the imaginary and the symbolic.

*M. VALABREGA: I didn't make myself clear. The debate you're referring to, concerning the origins of mathematics, between intuitionists and non-intuitionists, is certainly very interesting, but it is an old one, and it is besides the point when it comes to the question I'm raising, which has to do with the idea and not the perception of a triangle or a circle. It is the pointedness that there is in the very notion of triangularity, for instance, which I am getting at.*

We could take another look at the text you mentioned. I read a part of it again this year on the subject of maxima and minima, but I'm no longer very clear how Nicholas da Cusa tackles the question of the triangle. I think that for him the triangle is far more the ternary than the triangle.

*M. VALABREGA: I am not specifically referring to him. It seems to me that the notion of triangularity, whatever the intuitionist or non-intuitionist positions of mathematicians, cannot be other than symbolic.*

Without a doubt.

*M. VALABREGA: Well then, the cybernetic machine should recognise this triangularity, which it doesn't. That is why you, it seems, were inclined to say that triangularity in fact belonged to the imaginary order.*

<sup>2</sup> English in the original.

Absolutely not.

One must give a far more problematic sense to the fact that the machine recognises. This triangularity you're talking about is in some way the very structure of the machine. It is the basis on which the machine comes into being as such. If we have 0 and 1, something comes after. It is on the basis of a succession that the independence of 0 and 1 can be established, the symbolic generation of the connotations of presence-absence. I showed you that the logical product, logical addition, always requires three columns. In one such margin, 0 and 1 will make 1, and in another, 0 and 1 will make 0. In other words, the ternarity is essential to the structure of the machine. And, of course, I prefer ternarity to triangularity, which lends itself to an image.

M. VALABREGA: *I wasn't talking about ternarity, but about triangularity. I was talking about the triangle itself, about the notion of the triangularity of the triangle, and not of ternarity.*

You mean the triangle as form?

M. VALABREGA: *If this notion belongs, as I think it does, to the symbolic order, it is inexplicable why one can't build a cybernetic machine which recognises the form of the triangle.*

Quite specifically in so far as it belongs to the order of the imaginary.

M. VALABREGA: *So it doesn't belong to the symbolic order.*

It is the function 3 which is really minimal in the machine.

M. RIGUET: *Yes. One could generalise the question somewhat, asking whether the machine can recognise a certain ternary relation in another machine? The answer is yes. Whether it recognises the triangle in all cases is, in my view, perhaps not an impossible question, although it is far from being resolved. But, within the order of forms, the triangle is highly symbolised – there are no triangles in nature.*

M. VALABREGA: *If the problem were insoluble, one would have to suppose that the notion of triangularity at issue didn't belong to the symbolic order, but also to the imaginary order.*

Yes.

M. VALABREGA: *If only concrete elaborated concepts exist, there is a contradiction with research in axiomatics. In axiomatics, it seems that one eliminates – at least in large part, a residue is all that is left, and some people have said that there is nothing left over – the concrete concepts of intuition. That's a question.*

You mean that there is as wide a margin as one wants. The problem remains open.

M. VALABREGA: Yes, in the sense that you yourself said that the triangle doesn't exist in nature. So then, what is this intuition? It isn't a concrete concept, an elaboration on the basis of existing forms. It is a notion, it is symbolic.

M. RIGUET: In recent researches in axiomatics, a triangle is something symbolic, for a triangle is a certain relation.

Yes. One can reduce the triangle to a certain relation.

M. RIGUET: A notion of the incidence between points and straight lines.

As a consequence, the machine must be able to recognise it in the end?

M. RIGUET: Yes. But one must define very precisely the universe of all the forms which we can consider. And you ask the machine to recognise a well determined form from amongst these.

It is on the basis of an already effected symbolic reduction of forms, in fact of the work already performed by the machine, that one asks the real, concrete machine to operate.

M. MARCHANT: That's a matter of description.

No, I don't think so.

M. RIGUET: It is a description of the relation which you impose on this incidental relation, requiring it to have a certain number of properties, without, however, enumerating them. It is a non-enumerative description, because you don't draw up a list of all the straight lines, of all the points you are considering, but a list of all the points, lines, etc. in nature. That is where the imaginary comes in.

M. MARCHANT: Where do you place this concept, in what domain?

M. RIGUET: It isn't very useful, if you don't situate yourself within the framework of a deterministic axiomatic. I've talked of the incidence of the straight line, but there are other ways of axiomatising elementary geometry.

O. MANNONI: One can in fact constitute the triangle schematically, even without knowing that we are talking about a triangle. How are we to be sure that the triangle we are drawing is a triangle? That is a problem concerning the relation of the symbolic to the imaginary, and it's very obscure.

Yes. Taken in the opposite sense, if I may say so.

O. MANNONI: Yes, the other way around.

M. RIGUET: When you recognise a triangle drawn on a sheet of paper, you accumulate a certain number of properties which have their correlate in the axiomatic model which you are considering.

O. MANNONI: *So, you speak two languages which translate.*

Absolutely.

O. MANNONI: *So the imaginary is already language, already symbolic.*

The language embodied in a human language is made up of, and there's no doubt about this, choice images which all have a specific relation with the living existence of the human being, with quite a narrow sector of its biological reality, with the image of the fellow being. This imaginary experience furnishes ballast for every concrete language, and by the same token for every verbal exchange, with this something which makes it a human language – in the most down to earth and most ordinary sense of the word human, in the English sense of 'human'.<sup>3</sup>

It is precisely through that that it may be an obstacle to the progress of the realisation of the subject in the symbolic order, whose pure function manifests itself in a thousand ways in human life, a function connutable in terms of presence and absence, of being and non-being.

And that is indeed why we are always faced with some sort of resistance opposing the restitution of the integral text of the symbolic exchange. We are embodied beings, and we always think by means of some imaginary go-between, which halts, stops, clouds up the symbolic mediation. The latter is perpetually ground up, interrupted.

O. MANNONI: *What bothers me is the feeling I have that this imaginary lining doesn't just grind up, but is the indispensable nourishment of the symbolic language, and that language, if completely deprived of this nourishment, becomes the machine, that is to say something which is no longer human.*

Don't be soft. Don't go and say that the machine is really rather nasty and that it clutters up our lives. That is not what is at stake. The machine is simply the succession of little 0s and 1s, so that the question as to whether it is human or not is obviously entirely settled – it isn't. Except, there's also the question of knowing whether the human, in the sense in which you understand it, is as human as all that.

O. MANNONI: *That is a very serious question.*

All the same, the notion of humanism, which I won't give you a seminar on, seems to me to be for us sufficiently weighed down by history so as to be capable of being considered as a particular position realised within a very much localised field which we imprudently continue to call humanity. And we shouldn't be surprised by the fact that the symbolic order is absolutely

<sup>3</sup> English in the original.

irreducible to what is commonly called human experience. You tell me that there would be nothing if it weren't embodied in this imagination. We don't doubt it for a minute, but are all the roots there? Nothing entitles us to say so. Not only hasn't the empirical deduction of whole numbers been accomplished, but it even seems to have been proved that it can't be.

### 3

I will try to relate all these considerations to the little summarising schema I've already introduced you to.

At the beginning of the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud explains the stages of the process of analysis. An illuminating text, a copy of which you should all have in your pockets, so that you can refer to it at any moment.

First, he says, we took as our goal the resolution of the symptom by giving it its signification. Some insights were gained and even some effects were produced by using this procedure.

FATHER BEIRNAERT: *Why?*

What I am teaching you only tries to express the conditions thanks to which what Freud says is possible. Why? you ask. Because the symptom is in itself, through and through, signification, that is to say, truth, truth taking shape. It is to be distinguished from the natural index in that it is already structured in terms of signified and signifier, with all that that entails, namely the play of signifiers. Even within the concrete given of the symptom, there is already a precipitation into signifying material. The symptom is the inverse side of a discourse.

FATHER BEIRNAERT: *But how is immediate communication to the patient efficacious?*

The communication of the signification to the patient cures to the extent that it produces *Überzeugung*, that is to say, conviction. The subject integrates the explication which you give him into the set of significations he has already admitted, and that may have an effect, in a punctual way, in wild analysis. But it is far from being generally the case.

That is why we move on to the second stage, in which the necessity of integration in the imaginary is recognised. What must emerge is not simply understanding of the signification, but reminiscence properly speaking, that is the passage into the imaginary. The patient has to reintegrate the sequence of significations which had not been recognised [*méconnaître*] into this imaginary continuum which we call the ego, to recognise it as being his, to integrate it into his biography. At the moment, I am following the beginning of the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Third stage – one realises that that isn't enough, namely that there is an inertia peculiar to what is already structured within the imaginary.

*The main emphasis, during the course of these efforts, the text goes on, falls on the resistances of the patient. Now the art is to discover in the quickest possible manner these resistances, to show them to the patient, and to move him, push him through human influence, to bring him to give up these resistances. Even via this path, it is not always entirely possible to achieve the coming to consciousness, the becoming conscious of the unconscious. All this remembering is not, perhaps, strictly the essential thing, if one doesn't at the same time obtain Überzeugung, conviction.*<sup>4</sup>

You have to read the text as I do, in German, for the French text – as a result of the art of the translator – has something greyish, pasty about it, which conceals the violence of the picture Freud is sketching.

Freud insists on the following, that after the reduction of the resistances, there is a residue which may be what is essential. Here he introduces the notion of repetition, *Wiederholung*. It consists essentially in the following, he says, that on the side of what is repressed, on the unconscious side of things, there is no resistance, there is only a tendency to repeat.

In this same text, Freud underlines the originality of his new topography. The simple qualitative connotation unconscious/conscious isn't the essential thing here. The line of cleavage doesn't pass between the unconscious and the conscious, but between, on the one hand, something which is repressed and tends simply to repeat itself, that is to say speech which insists, this unconscious modulation of which I talk, and on the other hand, something which is an obstacle to it, and which is organised in another manner, namely the ego. If you read this text in the light of the notions which I believe I have inured you to, you will see that the ego is strictly located there as belonging to the order of the imaginary. And Freud stresses that all resistance as such comes from this order.

Before I leave you, and since one must punctuate, put in a final full stop, to serve you as an orientation table, I will turn once again to the four poles which I have more than once written on the board.

I begin with *A*, which is the radical Other, that of the eighth or ninth hypothesis of Parmenides, which is equally the real pole of the subjective relation and is what Freud ties the relation to the death instinct to.

Then, here you have *m*, the ego, and *a*, the other which isn't an other at all, since it is essentially coupled with the ego, in a relation which is always reflexive, interchangeable – the *ego* is always an *alter-ego*.

Here you have *S*, which is simultaneously the subject, the symbol, and also the *Es*. The symbolic realisation of the subject, which is always a symbolic creation, is the relation between *A* and *S*. It is subjacent, unconscious, essential to every subjective situation.

This schematisation doesn't start off with an isolated and absolute subject.

<sup>4</sup> See GW XIII 16; Stud III 228; SE XVIII 18.

Everything is tied to the symbolic order, since there are men in the world and they speak. And what is transmitted and tends to get constituted is an immense message into which the entire real is little by little retransplanted, recreated, remade. The symbolisation of the real tends to be equivalent to the universe, and the subjects are only relays, supports in it. What we get up to in all this is to make a break on the level of one of these couplings.

You won't understand anything unless you start with this, which the whole of Freud's work teaches us and reminds us of. Take the schema of the psychic apparatus, which appears in one of the little manuscripts Freud used to send Fliess, and also at the end of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. One might think that he was simply trying to formalise using what could be called the scientific symbolic – nothing could be further off the mark. The critical point in what Freud is doing, the idea which can be found nowhere else, is what he insists on principally in Chapter VII – there really is an opposition between conscious and unconscious functions. This starting point – justified or not, it doesn't matter, we are engaged in commenting on Freud – seems essential to him in order to explain what actually happens with the subjects with whom he is dealing, in order to understand the domains of psychic life. What happens on the level of pure consciousness, on the level of the cortex in which this reflection of the world which is where consciousness is located, is as such immediately erased, leaving no traces. The traces take place elsewhere.

This has been the starting-point for many absurdities, fed by this term 'depth' which Freud could have avoided, and which has been so abused. That means that in the end, the living organism can only receive, record, what it is constructed to receive – more precisely, that its functions are far more constructed in order *not* to receive than to receive. It doesn't see, it doesn't hear, what isn't useful to its biological subsistence. Except, the human being goes beyond the real which is biologically natural to it. And that is where the problem begins.

All animal machines are strictly riveted to the conditions of the external environment. If they vary, it is, we are told, to the extent that this external environment varies. Of course, the essence of most animal species is not to want to know anything about what bothers them – they'd rather peg out. That is in fact why they do peg out, and why we are strong. Freud's inspiration isn't mystical. He doesn't think that there is a morphogenic power as such in life. For the animal, the type, the form are linked to a choice in the external environment, as inside and outside. Why is it otherwise for the human being?

There are enough really rather tiresome laboratory experiments, which show that if one holds an octopus, or any other animal, with sufficient doggedness in front of a triangle, they will recognise it in the end, that is to say generalise it. M. Valabrega's question should be answered on the level of the general. But what is new in man is that something is already sufficiently open,

imperceptibly shifted within the imaginary coaptation, for the symbolic use of the image to be inserted into it.

One has to assume a certain biological gap in him, which I try to define when I talk to you about the mirror stage. The total captation of desire, of attention, already assumes the lack. The lack is already there when I speak of the desire of the human subject in relation to his image, of this extremely general imaginary relation which we call narcissism.

Living animal subjects are sensitive to the image of their own kind. This is an absolutely essential point, thanks to which the whole of living creation isn't an immense orgy. But the human being has a special relation with his own image – a relation of gap, of alienating tension. That is where the possibility of the order of presence and absence, that is of the symbolic order, comes in. The tension between the symbolic and the real is subjacent here. It is substantial, if you are willing enough to give the term substance its purely etymological meaning. It's an *upokeimenon*.

For all existing human subjects, the relation between *A* and *S* will always pass via the intermediary of these imaginary substrates, the ego and the other, which constitute the imaginary foundation of the object – *A, m, a, S*.

Let us try to light up the magic lantern a little. We are going to take on a mechanical outlook, which is the enemy of man, by imagining there to be a triode lamp at the point of intersection of the symbolic direction and the passage through the imaginary. Let us suppose that a current passes down the circuit. If there is a vacuum, a bombarding of electrons takes place between the cathode and the anode, thanks to which the current passes. Besides the anode and the cathode, there is a third electrode, a transverse one. You can make the current pass through it by making it positive, in such a way that the electrons are led towards the anode, or else by making it negative, cutting the process short – what emanates from the negative is repelled by the negative you've interposed.

It is simply a new version of the story of the door which I spoke of the other day, on account of the non-homogeneous character of the audience. Let us say that it is a door in a door, a door to the power of two, a door within the door. The imaginary is thus in a position to interrupt, to grind up, to scan what passes on the level of the circuit.

Note that what happens between *A* and *S* in itself has a conflictual character. At best, the circuit contradicts itself, cuts itself off, grinds itself up. I say *at best*, for the universal discourse is symbolic, it comes from a long way back, we didn't invent it. We didn't invent non-being, we fell into this little corner of non-being. And as far as the transmission of the imaginary is concerned, we've had our fill of it, what with all the fornications of our parents, grandparents, and the other scandalous stories which give psychoanalysis its piquancy.

From then on, the necessities of language and those of interhuman communication are easy to understand. You know those messages that the

subject sends out in a form which structures them, grammaticalises them, as coming from the other, in an inverted form. When a subject says to another *you are my master* or *you are my wife*, it means precisely the opposite. It passes via *A* and via *m*, and then gets to the subject, who it all of a sudden enthrones in the perilous and problematic position of spouse or disciple. That's how fundamental speech is expressed.

Well then, what is the symptom, or to put it another way, the neurosis, about? You may have noted that in the circuit, the ego is really separated from the subject by the little *a*, that is to say by the other. And yet, there is a bond. I am me, and so are you, you. Between the two, there is this structuring given, namely that the subjects are embodied. In effect, what happens at the level of the symbol happens in all living beings. What is present in *S* passes via the corporeal support of the subject in order to be realised, via a biological reality which establishes a division between the imaginary function of the living organism, of which the ego is one of the structured forms – we don't really have any cause for complaint – and the symbolic function which it is capable of filling and which gives it a preeminent position *vis-à-vis* the real.

To say that there is a neurosis, to say that there is a repressed, which never goes anywhere without a return ticket, is to say that something of the discourse going from *A* to *S* passes and yet at the same time doesn't pass.

What merits the name resistance is the fact that the ego isn't identical to the subject, and it is in the nature of the ego to integrate itself into the imaginary circuit which determines the interruptions of the fundamental discourse. It is this resistance that Freud emphasises when he says that every resistance stems from the organisation of the ego. For it is in so far as it is imaginary, and not simply in so far as it is carnal existence, that the ego is, in analysis, the mainspring of the interruptions of this discourse, which simply asks to be put into action, into speech, or into *Wiederholen* – it amounts to the same thing.

When I tell you that the only real resistance in analysis is the resistance of the analyst, that means that an analysis is conceivable only to the extent that the *a* is effaced. A certain subjective purification must be accomplished in analysis – otherwise, what is the point of all these ceremonials which we subject ourselves to? – in such a way that one can throughout the analytic experience, confuse the pole *a* with the pole *A*.

The analyst partakes of the radical nature of the Other, in so far as he is what is most inaccessible. From then on, and beginning at this point in time, what leaves the imaginary of the ego of the subject is in accordance not with this other to which he is accustomed, and who is just his partner, the person who is made so as to enter into his game, but precisely with this radical Other which is hidden from him. What is called transference happens very precisely between *A* and *m*, in so far as *a*, represented by the analyst, is lacking.

What is involved, as Freud says in an admirable way in this text, is an

*Überlegenheit* – which on this occasion is translated by *supériorité*,<sup>5</sup> but I suspect there is a play on words here, as what follows indicates – thanks to which the reality which appears in the analytic situation is recognised *immer*, always, *als Spiegelung* – an astonishing term – *as the mirage* of a certain forgotten past.<sup>6</sup> The term *Spiegel*, mirror, is there. From the moment the resistance of the imaginary function of the ego no longer exists, the *A* and the *m* can in some way come to an accord, communicate enough so that a certain isochronism is established between them, a certain simultaneous positivization, in relation to our triode lamp. The fundamental speech which goes from *A* to *S* here encounters a harmonic vibration, something which, far from interfering, allows its passage. One can even give this triode lamp its real role, which is often that of an amplifier, and say that the fundamental discourse – up until then censored – to use the best term – becomes clearer.

This progress is achieved by the effect of transference, which happens somewhere other than the repetitive tendency. What insists, what simply demands to pass through, takes place between *A* and *S*. Whereas transference takes place between *m* and *a*. And it is to the extent that the *m* learns little by little, if one may put it this way, to come to agree with the fundamental discourse, that it can be treated in the same way as the *A* is treated, that is little by little linked to the *S*.

This doesn't mean that an allegedly autonomous ego finds support in the ego of the analyst, as Loewenstein writes in a text I won't read you today, but which I meticulously selected, becoming a stronger and stronger ego. On the contrary, it means that the ego becomes what it wasn't, that it gets to the point where the subject is.

Don't, however, get the idea that the ego volatilises after an analysis – be it didactic or therapeutic, one doesn't go to heaven, disembodied and pure symbol.

All analytic experience is an experience of signification. One of the great objections which is made to us is the following – what catastrophe will come about if one reveals to the subject his reality, his *je-ne-sais-quoi*-drive, his homosexual life? Lord knows how much the moralists have to tell us under this heading. And yet it is nonetheless an unfounded and empty objection. Even admitting that one reveals to the subject some tendency which might well have been kept at bay by him forever, through I don't know what effort, what is at stake in analysis is not our revealing his reality to the subject. A certain conception of the analysis of resistances is to be traced, in fact, within this register. But the authentic experience of analysis is absolutely opposed to it – through the analysis the subject discovers his truth, that is to say the

<sup>5</sup> 'aloofness' in SE.

<sup>6</sup> GW XIII 17; Stud III 229; SE XVIII 19.

signification taken on in his particular destiny by those givens which are peculiar to him and which one can call his lot.

Human beings are born with all kinds of extremely heterogeneous dispositions. But whatever the fundamental lot is, the biological lot, what analysis reveals to the subject is its signification. This signification is a function of a certain speech, which is and which isn't the speech of the subject – this speech, he already receives it ready-made, he is its point of passage. I don't know if that is the original master word of the Book of Judgement in the Rabbinical tradition. We aren't searching that far off, we have more limited problems, but ones in which the terms of vocation and of calling have their full value.

If this speech received by the subject didn't exist, this speech which bears on the symbolic level, there would be no conflict with the imaginary, and each of us would purely and simply follow his inclination. Experience shows us that nothing of the sort happens. Freud never renounced an essential dualism as constitutive of the subject. This means nothing other than these intersections. I would like to pursue them.

The ego is inscribed in the imaginary. Everything pertaining to the ego is inscribed in imaginary tensions, like all the other libidinal tensions. Libido and the ego are on the same side. Narcissism is libidinal. The ego isn't a superior power, nor a pure spirit, nor an autonomous agency, nor a conflict-free sphere – as some dare to write – in which we could find some support. What kind of story is this? Do we have to exact from subjects their higher tendencies towards truth? What is this transcendent tendency towards sublimation? Freud repudiates it in the most formal way in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He cannot find the slightest tendency towards progress in any of the concrete and historical manifestations of human functions, and this really has a value for the person who invented our method. All forms of life are as surprising, as miraculous, there is no tendency towards superior forms.

This is the point where we open out into the symbolic order, which isn't the libidinal order in which the ego is inscribed, along with all the drives. It tends beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the limits of life, and that is why Freud identifies it with the death instinct. Reread the text, and you'll see whether it seems to you worthy of being endorsed. The symbolic order is rejected by the libidinal order, which includes the whole of the domain of the imaginary, including the structure of the ego. And the death instinct is only the mask of the symbolic order, in so far – this is what Freud writes – as it is dumb, that is to say in so far as it hasn't been realised. As long as the symbolic recognition hasn't been instituted, by definition, the symbolic order is dumb.

The symbolic order is simultaneously non-being and insisting to be, that is what Freud has in mind when he talks about the death instinct as being what is most fundamental – a symbolic order in travail, in the process of coming, insisting on being realised.

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